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ABSTRACT

This monograph is comprised of five papers originally presented at a symposium concerning degree completion or non-completion (ABDs--"all but dissertation") of doctoral students in colleges of education. The first paper is by Raymond Kluever and is titled "ABDs and Graduates from a College of Education: Responsibility, Barriers, and Facilitators." Results found graduates more likely than non-graduates to be in on-campus programs and to rate themselves as independent and resourceful but less likely to rate as important assistance with beginning and implementing the dissertation. The second study, "Academic Procrastination and Perfectionism: A Comparison of Graduates and ABDs" (Kathy E. Green) found mean scores for cognitive and affective factors resulting in procrastination were significantly higher for ABDs than for graduates. The third paper is "Factors Affecting the Completion of the Doctoral Dissertation for Non-Traditional Aged Women" by Kathryn Lenz. This study found "completers" were enabled by: a stimulating, exciting topic; a caring advisor; and family and peer support. Completion inhibitors were a lack of these factors as well as time and money constraints. Perfectionistic traits acted as either enablers or inhibitors depending on the individual. The fourth paper, "ABD Status and Degree Completion: A Student's Perspective" (by Margaret M. Miller) found that leaving a doctoral program prior to degree completion was due to the student's relationship with the adviser, financial considerations, and personal problems. The final paper, by Elinor Katz, is titled "The Dissertation: Academic Interruptus." This paper supports restructuring the dissertation process to include development of dissertation seminars and clubs, more faculty support at critical stages in the process, and the infusion of more research experiences in the graduate program. (All papers contain extensive references.) (DB)

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Graduates and ABDs in Colleges of Education: Characteristics and Implications for the Structure of Doctoral Programs

A symposium presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association

April 22, 1995, San Francisco

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For information, contact Dr. Elinor Katz, Dean, College of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208.
(303) 871-3665

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Graduates and ABDs in College of Education: Characteristics and Implications for the Structure of Doctoral Programs

MODERATOR:

Tony Lam, University of Toronto

PRESENTERS:

Dr. Raymond Kluever, University of Denver - ABDs and Graduates from a College of Education: Responsibility, Barriers, and Facilitators - p. 3

Dr. Kathy Green, University of Denver - Academic Procrastination and Perfectionism: A Comparison of Graduates and ABDs - p. 15

Dr. Kathy Lenz, University of Denver - Factors Affecting the Completion of the Doctoral Dissertation for Non-Traditional Aged Women - p. 25

Ms. Margaret Miller, University of Denver - ABD Status and Degree Completion: A Student's Perspective - p. 41

Dr. Elinor Katz, University of Denver - The Dissertation: Academic Interruptus - p. 53

DISCUSSANT:

Leonard Baird, Ohio State University

Graduates and ABDs in Colleges of Education: Characteristics and Implications for the Structure of Doctoral Programs

> Almost everyone in the academic community numbers among his acquaintances a bright, able, hard working scholar who has completed all the requirements for an advanced degree save one: the dissertation. At some stage in its preparation, the manuscript laid aside for one reason or another, usually with the expectation that it would soon be resumed. Yet, there it remains--unfinished, unforgotten; a source of intense frustration and disappointment; a reproachful reminder of wasted time, money, and intellectual effort.
>
> D. Madsen, Successful Dissertations and Theses (p.xi)

Retention of students is a major concern in higher education today. Enrollment has a direct impact on both the university budget and on a university's reputation as a degree granting institution which seeks to attract students for the future. The student and university collaborate in the educational process; a major allocation of resources is required from both parties. This is particularly true of doctoral programs.

Attrition from doctoral programs in education is estimated at approximately 50% (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992) in contrast to completion rates of over 90% for fields such as law and business. About 20% of students struggle, procrastinate and eventually give up at the dissertation stage (ABDs). This symposium addresses identifiable differences between ABD students and students who graduate, reflections from the perspective of an ABD, characteristics of a special group of students found in colleges of education (nontraditional aged women), and potential strategies that educators can use to support students through the dissertation process.

ABDs and Graduates from a College of Education:

Responsibility, Barriers, and Facilitators

Raymond Kluever, Ph.D.

Associate Professor Emeritus

University of Denver

A paper presented as part of the symposium entitled "ABDs and Graduates from a College of Education: Characteristics and Implications for the Structure of Doctoral Programs" at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1995.

Abstract

The attrition of doctoral candidates from graduate programs in education is a major concern. This is the second phase of a study comparing the characteristics of doctoral graduates from a College of Education with ABDs who completed course work and doctoral final exams but not their dissertations. Results of a survey distributed to both groups were summarized in this study. There were some similarities between groups. A high proportion of both groups reported full time employment as their means of financial support while completing their dissertation. Neither group reported extensive prior experience with research. Both groups perceived their advisor and family/spouse as their primary source of emotional support through the dissertation process. But some differences between groups were identified. More students with on-campus programs than off-campus programs were graduates. Results from two scales suggested that graduates perceived themselves as more independent and resourceful than students. Students rated the need for assistance with beginning and implementing the dissertation more highly than graduates rated these topics. However, the differences between groups were not found to be so great that some university program modifications could not be implemented to increase the percentage of doctoral graduates.

A major concern of Colleges of Education is the estimated 50% attrition rate from doctoral programs (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Cesari, 1990) whereas in other fields such as law and business, the completion rate exceeds 90%. This severely impacts university and college resources and the outlook for improvement in the 1990s is not encouraging. Commonly cited comments from interviews with students who have not completed their degree indicate that financial problems, shifts of interest, demands of work and family, discontent with advisors and program orientation, and personal concerns lead to the decision to terminate their program before completion of the dissertation. Universities invest considerable resources in doctoral preparation through small seminars, highly individualized advising, and supervision of independent research. Certainly, this presents implications for efficient utilization of university resources as well as for the individual student. Information which will lead to advising and program reorientation to increase the proportion of doctoral candidates who graduate will be of great value for both the university and for the students whose goal is completion of the doctoral degree.

The purpose of this study was to compare the scholarly and academic credentials of doctoral graduates in education with those of non-graduates (ABDs) who have only their dissertation to complete. Further concerns included an analysis of university programmatic patterns and student/university relationships that facilitate or impede progress toward degree completion. Implications from this study will lead to modified admission standards, guidelines for counseling and advising of admitted students toward completion of their degree, and in university program efforts to retain admitted students.

Method

Subjects for this study were drawn from an urban private university College of Education in a western state. This College enrolls primarily doctoral students along with a smaller number of M.A. candidates and certificate students. The sample included all of the 154 doctoral graduates from the past 5 years (1988-93) and a sample consisting of the 111 students who completed all their course work and passed their doctoral comprehensive exams but had not completed their dissertations.

A survey form based on the responses from two focus groups and other appropriate scales derived from the literature was prepared and sent to all 154 graduates and 111 students in winter 1994. The survey consisted of 3 scales along with questions about each subject's experiences concerning dissertation preparation, strategies they employed in the process, and attitudes relating to events associated with working on a dissertation. Background information included items associated with employment while doing the dissertation, previous experience with research, local or distant places of residence from the campus, financial support, and ratings of perceived support systems. Responses to some items were omitted by some subjects and are reflected in the differing total sample sizes reported.

Three scales were completed by subjects. These included a Likert scale concerning attitudes toward dissertation completion, a Help-Hindrance scale with ratings of helpful and non-helpful activities and events, and a Responsibility scale which listed items which were rated as being primarily student or primarily university responsibilities. Results of the Help-Hindrance scale and the Responsibility scale are reported below but the Likert scale results will be found in another report in this document (Green, 1995).

The Help-Hindrance scale consisted of 45 items with 8 choices ranging from major hindrance (1) to major help (7) and a not applicable choice (8). The midpoint between major hindrance and major help was a "4". The mean scores for choices 1 through 7 were computed for each group.

The Responsibility scale is a list of 16 tasks that must be completed for the doctoral degree. The 16 items were considered twice by each respondent; once representing the task as presently practiced (as is) and secondly, the task as the respondent would prefer it to be (should be). The "responsibility" was rated on a 7 point continuum from student responsibility (1) to university responsibility (7). Mean scores of ratings were computed for each of the 16 "as is" items and each of the 16 "should be" items.

Surveys were distributed by mail to each graduate and student. A stamped addressed envelope was enclosed for the survey to be returned. The surveys for each of the two groups contained the same inventories and statements except for verb tense relating to dissertations completed vs. dissertations which were in the process of being completed.

Objective responses and personal impressions were a desired outcome of this survey. In order to encourage this, both groups were guaranteed that individual survey responses would not be available for any

faculty member to review. ID's but no names were recorded on each survey form. All forms were returned to a departmental secretary who recorded the ID of the respondent and then forwarded the form to a retired faculty member for data entry and analysis. The secretary sent a second and third follow-up form to those persons whose forms were not returned within 3 weeks. The secretary's records provided the names of those who were to receive the follow-up forms from the list of names and ID's. Three weeks after the third mailing, no more completed forms were received and data analysis was begun. Ninety-two percent of the graduates (142/154) and 87 percent of the students (97/111) returned their surveys.

Results

The distribution of subjects by gender is summarized in Table 1 indicating that females made up 69% of the graduate group and 75% of the student group. Males composed 31% of the graduate group and 25 % of the student group.

Table 1
Percent of Graduates and Students by Gender

	Graduates	Students	Total
Females	106 (69%)	83 (75%)	189 (71%)
Males	48 (31%)	28 (25%)	76 (29%)
Total	154 (58%)	111 (42%)	265

Among the 10 concentration areas, seven of them showed percentages of graduates and students that were reasonable approximations of the proportions to the total sample percentages which were 58% graduates and 42 % students (Table 2). Deviant proportions (more than twice the percent in one group as the other) were identified in three areas. Two areas had a larger proportion of students than graduates (Curriculum Leadership and Gifted/ Talented) while one area had a greater proportion of graduates than students (Counseling Psychology). All students had passed their doctoral comprehensive exams.

Table 2
Percent of Graduates and Students by area of Concentration*

Group	Concentration									
	1	2	3	4	5	5	7	8	9	10
Grad.	20	12	2	16	29	5	2	11	1	3
Stud.	15	8	4	34	12	6	7	10	2	3

* Concentration Areas:

1. Higher Education Administration
2. School Administration
3. Early Childhood Special Education
4. Curriculum Leadership
5. Counseling Psychology
6. Human Services Leadership
7. Gifted and Talented
8. School Psychology
9. Special Education Administration
10. Educational Psychology

Table 3 summarizes the current employment status of graduates and students by gender. The percent of individuals with full time, part time, or no employment reported by graduates and students are very similar. In both groups, males reported more full time employment and females a higher proportion of part time work.

Table 3

Number and Percent of Graduates and Students Current Employment Status by Gender (N=215)

Employment	Graduates		Students	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Full Time	57 (72%)	44 (92%)	43 (72%)	24 (89%)
Part Time	21 (27%)	3 (6%)	14 (23%)	2 (7%)
Unemployed	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	4 (7%)	1 (4%)
Total	79	48	61	27

For both males and females of both groups, employment was ranked highest as the means of financial support while the dissertation was in process (Table 4). Support from spouse and family was also ranked high. The least support was derived from grants. Although loans and GRA/GTA assignments were rated as a minimal source of support, graduates rated them significantly higher than students ($t=-4.14$, $p<.001$).

Table 4

Degree of Financial Support from Various Sources While Working on the Dissertation for Graduates and Students by Gender*

Source of Support	Graduates				Students			
	Females		Males		Females		Males	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Loans	2.0	1.6	1.9	1.5	1.6	1.2	1.9	1.6
GRA/GTA	2.0	1.6	2.0	1.6	1.3	0.9	1.2	0.9
Grant	1.6	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.5	0.9	1.3	0.8
Employment	3.5	1.6	4.1	1.5	4.1	1.4	4.6	1.1
Savings	3.2	1.6	2.9	1.7	3.4	1.7	3.1	1.5
Spouse/Family	3.1	1.7	2.6	1.7	3.2	1.8	2.7	1.8
Other	2.6	1.8	1.6	1.4	3.0	1.9	2.6	1.9

*Scale: 1 = Low 5 = High

Table 5 summarizes previous research experiences of both groups. Graduates, particularly males, tended to have somewhat more experience with data analysis than students. Experience in conducting research was similar for both groups as was their experience in publishing research. Publication of a scholarly document independently is a new experience for many of them since only a small percent of both groups reported experience in publishing research; 16% of the students and 18 % of the graduates.

Table 5

Number and Percent of Graduates and Students by Gender with Research Experience

	Graduates		Students	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
With Data Analysis Experience	37 (47%)	31 (66%)	35 (57%)	13 (48%)
No Data Analysis Experience	42 (53%)	16 (34%)	25 (25%)	14 (52%)
Experienced Conducting Research	46 (58%)	29 (60%)	34 (56%)	16 (59%)
No Experience Conducting Research	33 (42%)	19 (40%)	27 (44%)	11 (41%)
Have Published Research	13 (16%)	11 (23%)	6 (10%)	6 (22%)
Have Not Published Research	66 (84%)	37 (77%)	53 (90%)	21 (78%)

It was anticipated that lack of close contact with university resources and advisors would delay dissertation completion. Results from the survey displayed in Table 6 indicated that a higher proportion of students than graduates did not live in Denver while working on the dissertation. Male students, more often than female students lived away from the campus area. A similar pattern was found for graduates where a higher percentage of females than males lived in Denver. Family circumstances may have been a factor in each of these events.

Table 6
Number and Percent of Graduates and Students by Gender Who Lived in Denver While Doing the Dissertation
(N=213)

	Graduates		Students		
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Total
Lived in Denver	53 (67%)	28 (58%)	33 (55%)	8 (30%)	122
Lived Mostly in Denver	8 (10%)	7 (15%)	3 (5%)	2 (7%)	20
Did Not Live in Denver	17 (22%)	13 (27%)	24 (40%)	17 (63%)	71
Total	78	48	60	27	

A rating scale (Table 7) was used to indicate the degree of emotional support provided by different individuals while the dissertation was in process. The advisor and family were rated by both groups as providing the most support and the dissertation committee provided the least. But in all three cases, the mean rating of students was significantly lower than the mean rating of graduates ($t=-4.19$, $p<.001$; $t=-2.52$, $p<.013$; $t=-3.01$, $p<.003$). Other students (peers) were also ranked as less supportive than other sources but there were no other significant differences in the ratings between the groups.

Table 7
Graduate and Student Attitude Concerning Emotional Support Offered by different Individuals While Working
on the Dissertation by Gender*

Individual	Graduate				Student			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Advisor	4.1	1.0	4.1	1.0	3.4	1.4	3.4	1.1
Committee	3.0	1.4	3.1	1.3	2.5	1.5	2.6	1.2
Students	2.8	1.3	3.0	1.3	3.1	1.4	2.9	1.3
Family	4.3	1.1	4.1	1.2	3.7	1.2	3.7	1.4
Friends	3.8	1.2	3.4	1.1	3.6	1.1	3.3	1.4
Other	3.8	1.6	3.9	1.7	3.8	1.2	3.3	1.6

*Scale: 1 = no support, 5 = much support

Help-Hindrance Scale

On the 45 item Help-Hindrance scale, most of the item means (41) clustered in the range of 3, 4, and 5, suggesting that many items represented minor hindrances, neutral, or minor help. Items that were rated as major hindrances (1 and 2) involved concerns about time pressures and financial/family concerns. Only one of the mean item scores was rated as a major help (a score of 6 or 7) by graduates and involved "persistence".

Significant differences in response choices between graduates and students were identified on 29 of the 45 items (Table 8). On all except one of the 29 items, students' mean ratings were in the direction of hindrance compared to graduates rating of those same items.

Table 8
Mean Values of Help-Hindrance Scale for Graduates and Students

Help-Hindrance Item	Graduates		Students	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Financial need for support	3.0	1.4	2.4	1.4*
2. Loss of free time for friends	2.5	1.1	2.5	1.1
3. Proximity to the University	3.8	1.9	3.1	2.0*
4. Library hours	4.0	1.7	4.2	1.8
5. Scheduling advisor meetings	4.2	1.9	3.2	1.9*
6. Conflict with dis. director	4.7	1.8	4.8	2.1

7. Dis. Director's perfectionism	4.8	1.6	4.7	1.9
8. My own perfectionism	4.2	1.7	3.6	1.7*
9. My lack of interest in topic	5.3	1.9	4.7	1.9
10. Faculty's lack of interest	4.8	2.1	4.0	1.9*
11. Choosing dissertation topic	3.7	1.7	3.1	1.8
12. Narrowing dissertation topic	3.7	1.7	3.1	1.8*
13. Finding a workable advisor	4.4	1.8	3.8	2.0*
14. Dis. process lacks structure	3.6	1.5	2.9	1.4*
15. Time mgm't. difficulty	3.6	1.6	2.9	1.3*
16. Lack prior research exposure	3.8	1.9	3.4	1.7
17. Lack prior data anal. exper.	3.4	1.8	3.0	1.7
18. Obstructive committee member	4.5	2.1	5.1	2.0*
19. Lack of director's support	5.0	2.1	4.4	2.1
20. Doing the lit. review	4.7	1.6	4.0	1.8*
21. Collecting the data	4.2	1.9	3.9	1.8
22. Typing/word processing	4.0	1.6	4.0	1.5
23. Job related pressures	2.7	1.8	1.9	1.4*
24. Setting time aside for dis	2.9	1.7	1.9	1.3*
25. Setting space aside for dis.	4.1	1.6	3.6	1.5*
26. Getting drafts from committee	4.4	1.7	4.8	2.3
27. Lack of constructive feedback	4.4	1.9	4.9	2.1
28. Delay in starting after comps.	3.8	1.8	2.6	1.6*
29. Conflict with family role (head)	3.7	2.1	2.8	1.7*
30. Inability to plan ahead	4.5	1.8	3.9	1.4*
31. Isolation from other students	3.4	1.5	3.0	1.6*
32. Advisor's support & encouragement	5.7	1.8	4.7	2.0*
33. Advisor returns drafts promptly	5.6	1.7	5.4	2.1
34. Collegial relation with advisor	5.9	1.6	5.2	1.8*
35. Self direction	5.8	1.4	4.6	1.8*
36. Support of family and friends	5.8	1.5	5.1	1.7*
37. Willing to take academic risks	5.7	1.4	4.9	1.7*
38. Organizational skills	5.9	1.4	5.0	1.5*
39. Time pressures	3.8	1.9	2.5	1.7*
40. Approaching dis. in sections	5.8	1.4	5.3	1.6*
41. Ability to live with ambiguity	5.0	1.7	4.3	1.9*
42. Advisor expects completed dis.	5.8	1.5	5.7	1.7
43. Love of the dis. topic	5.6	1.4	5.5	1.6
44. Persistence	6.3	1.1	5.7	1.5*
45. Sticking to a schedule	5.7	1.4	4.3	1.8*

* Difference significant at $p<.05$

In a discriminant analysis involving prediction of membership as a graduate or as a student on the basis of item responses, 81% of the individuals were predicted to be members of their respective groups. Graduates were more accurately predicted to be graduates (89%) than students were predicted to be students (67%). These findings suggest that there are identifiable differences between these two groups in their responses to the Help-Hindrance items.

Responsibility Scale

Only 4 responsibility items had significantly different mean responses between students and graduates with students rating tasks more highly as university responsibilities than graduates rated them (Tables 9 and 10). These items involved progressing through the dissertation, selecting a dissertation topic, locating research subjects, and scheduling the pace and timeline for completion of the dissertation. In a discriminant analysis, 78% of the subjects were predicted to be members of their respective groups based on

their responses to items. A higher percentage of graduates were correctly categorized (86%) than students (65%). Again, identifiable differences were noted between these two groups as was found with the Help-Hindrance scale.

Table 9
Responsibility Scale Mean Values for Students by Gender*

Item	Responsibility is				Responsibility should be			
	Females		Males		Females		Males	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Progressing through dissertation	1.6	0.9	2.1	1.2	3.4	1.1	3.0	1.2
Scheduling student advisor meetings	1.3	0.7	1.8	1.3	2.6	1.2	2.7	1.3
Locating relevant research materials	1.5	0.8	1.8	0.8	2.6	1.3	2.6	0.8
Selecting dissertation topic	1.6	1.2	1.7	0.9	2.5	1.2	2.0	1.0
Preparing human subjects application	1.3	0.7	1.6	0.8	2.8	1.5	2.7	1.2
Filing application for graduation	1.2	0.6	1.6	0.9	2.1	1.5	2.7	1.8
Locating subjects for data collection	1.3	0.7	1.8	1.0	2.9	1.4	2.7	1.4
Collecting dissertation data	1.2	0.5	1.3	0.7	1.8	1.4	1.6	1.0
Analyzing dissertation data	1.6	1.0	2.1	1.3	2.7	1.2	2.8	1.3
Interpreting dissertation data	1.7	1.0	2.1	1.1	2.7	1.2	2.7	1.2
Writing dissertation chapters	1.2	0.6	1.2	0.5	1.6	1.1	1.8	1.0
Evaluating presentation style of chapters	3.3	2.0	3.9	1.6	4.2	1.5	4.2	1.4
Contacting experts with appropriate background	1.4	0.9	2.2	1.2	2.9	1.3	3.3	1.2
Scheduling pace and timeline for completion	1.7	1.2	2.1	1.4	3.3	1.5	3.1	1.7
Evaluating dissertation content	4.5	2.0	4.4	1.5	4.5	1.4	4.6	1.2
Developing research tool skills	2.2	1.4	2.6	1.6	3.7	1.5	3.4	1.6

* Scale: 1 = Student responsibility; 7 = University responsibility

Table 10
Responsibility Scale Mean Values for Graduates by Gender*

Item	Responsibility is				Responsibility should be			
	Females		Males		Females		Males	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Progressing through dissertation	2.1	1.1	2.0	0.9	2.9	1.3	2.4	1.1
Scheduling student advisor meetings	1.8	1.3	1.7	1.0	2.6	1.5	2.1	1.3
Locating relevant research materials	1.8	1.1	1.7	1.0	2.5	1.3	2.2	1.2
Selecting dissertation topic	2.1	1.3	2.2	1.1	2.6	1.1	2.4	1.2
Preparing human subjects application form	2.4	1.6	1.9	1.3	3.3	1.5	2.7	1.6
Filing application for graduation	1.5	1.2	1.4	0.8	2.2	1.5	1.8	1.3
Locating subjects for data collection	1.8	1.3	1.6	0.9	2.6	1.4	2.2	1.1
Collecting dissertation data	1.4	1.0	1.2	0.6	1.6	1.0	1.4	0.7
Analyzing dissertation data	1.9	1.4	1.7	1.0	2.7	1.4	2.3	1.1
Interpreting dissertation data	2.2	1.4	1.9	1.0	2.9	1.3	2.4	1.1
Writing dissertation chapters	1.4	1.0	1.2	0.6	1.5	0.9	1.4	.08
Evaluating presentation style of chapters	3.6	1.9	3.2	1.7	4.0	1.4	3.6	1.4
Contacting experts with appropriate background	2.0	1.3	1.9	1.2	3.0	1.4	2.7	1.5
Scheduling pace and timeline for completion	2.3	1.7	2.1	1.2	3.0	1.5	3.0	1.4
Evaluating dissertation content	4.8	1.8	4.7	1.7	4.7	1.3	4.7	1.6
Developing research tool skills	2.8	1.9	2.6	1.7	4.1	1.8	3.5	1.8

* Scale: 1 = Student responsibility; 7 = University responsibility

Student Recommendations

Ten tasks that could facilitate dissertation completion were presented to students as a rating scale. The mean ratings ranged from 2.8 to 4.4 over a range of 1 to 5 (Table 11). Items involving regularly

scheduled meetings with one's advisor, seminars on approaching the dissertation, and a thorough understanding of university and college dissertation guidelines were rated most highly while requiring a dissertaion proposal prior to comprehensive exams was rated the lowest of the options. On nine of the ten items, students rated the support options higher than graduates rated them.

Table 11

Importance Ratings of Dissertation Support Options Presented to Graduates and to Students*

Item	Graduates		Students	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. General dissertation support group	3.5	1.3	3.9	1.1
2. Monthly meetings with advisor	4.1	1.0	4.4	0.8
3. Completion of a research project prior to dissertation	3.5	1.2	4.0	1.1
4. Updates with information about new College "rules"	4.1	4.0	4.4	0.8
5. Information about College standards of quality for issertation	4.2	0.9	4.4	0.9
6. Group to help students who completed exams over a year before beginning dissertation	3.1	1.3	3.9	1.2
7. Require a dissertation proposal prior to comps	2.8	1.2	3.2	1.5
8. Place greater emphasis on research within all courses	3.6	1.1	3.7	1.1
9. Provide experience with writing journal articles during the program	3.9	1.2	4.0	1.1
10. One time seminar/session on on how to approach doing a dissertation	4.2	1.0	4.2	1.0

* Scale value: 1 = Not helpful; 5 = Very helpful

Discussion

Responses from the survey items and the two scales indicated some differences in attitudes and impressions reported by individuals in these two groups. Responses of graduates suggested a greater sense of independence and of personal responsibility than was identified in student responses. In previous studies, Wright (1991) suggested that self motivation and the ability to work independently were essential for successful completion of the dissertation. Hobish (1978) felt that the inclusion of measures of personality were important in examining attrition from doctoral study. The underlying factors associated with these differences are unknown from this survey but may involve individual circumstances, experiences, personal characteristics, and self management skills.

A higher percentage of males than females in both groups rated full time employment as their primary means of financial support. Although GRA appointments were rated as a minimal basis of support by both groups they were rated much lower by students than by graduates. Perhaps, on a continuum of much support/ little support, students were at the little support end of the continuum when colleges distributed their allotments of support money. Or, students financial needs may have been greater than for those who graduated and this is reflected through differences in the ratings of each group. It was noted on the Help-Hindrance scale that financial problems were a concern of both groups. It is clear from this survey that financing one's livelihood through the dissertation is a concern. As a result, one's financial status may influence one's decision concerning allocation of time for the dissertation vs. daily survival. Abedi and Benkin (1987) computed a series of regression equations to predict the amount of time to completion of the dissertation. Among the many variables in the equation, finanical concerns were identified as the best predictor of time required to complete the dissertation. In a comparison of graduates and non-graduates, Benkin (1984) found the major difference between groups to be financial dilemmas as well as relationship with departmental faculty. This study, as well as previous ones, indicated clearly that careful management of one's financial status is a major factor in decisions concerning the rate of completion of the dissertation.

Employment is undoubtedly related to student financial concerns. Although it provides a source of needed income, it does so at the expense of time committments directed to the job rather than to the dissertation. Germeroth (1991) summarized some of the major barriers to dissertation completion which

included time and job pressures as well as a sense of personal perfectionism (p 64). For doctoral candidates contemplating the dissertation she recommended remaining on campus until the dissertation was completed and remaining very task oriented. A workable advisor and committee were also very desireable components of the process. Huguley (1988) found one of the major deterrents to dissertation completion was full time employment and the time it took away from working on the dissertation. The lack of structure in the dissertation stage was also a problem for many students. Wright (1991) recommended that a student who is considering employment before dissertation completion should carefully examine the workload of an anticipated position before accepting it. Having an acceptable dissertation proposal before leaving campus was recommended as absolutely essential. Research is reported to be a relatively new experience for many individuals. Both groups reported some experience with data analysis but very little with publication. Although both groups rated preparation of a proposal before the comprehensive exam as not desireable, there may be research experiences aligned with course work that will provide a foundation for later dissertation work. Preparation of a dissertation is a different process than passing courses and exams. It involves a one-to-one student/ advisor relationship and independent activity vs. group class assignments from the student. Throughout the preparation of the dissertation, there are no class assignments and peer relationships are different. Advisors provide direction and support but the student carries out the daily activities associated with the project independently, at their own initiative, and according to their own time-line. Personal, financial, motivational, and other perceived needs may disrupt progress toward completion of the study.

The difference in proportions of graduates and students in the Curriculum Leadership, Gifted & Talented, and the Counseling Psychology program noted above may relate to their program location and pattern of operation. The Curriculum Leadership program is conducted both on campus and at remote locations throughout the state. This could involve more difficult access to advisors and university resources. The Counseling Psychology program is conducted only on campus and is intensely supervised. Although differences were identified in this study by location of the program, the results of other studies suggests that mail and telephone contacts can provide adequate communication with the advisor and committee. The operation of each program must be carefully tailored to meet student needs.

Completion of a dissertation is an intense activity. For both groups, the advisor and the student's family and spouse served as the major source of emotional support and are most heavily invested in the dissertation. Other students and the balance of the dissertation committee were rated as providing little support. Since work on the dissertation is highly individual and there are no College organized groups of students working on the dissertation that meet regularly, the process can be a lonely one. Great independence and a strong sense of direction is required. Although many students rated themselves as having little experience with research students are dependent on their own resources and on those closest to them. It was noted that graduates rated emotional support from all sources more highly than students rated it. This may be a significant factor associated with dissertation completion.

The scales and check lists suggest that there are identifiable differences between the two groups. Since the differences are not great, the implications are that with some modification of procedures, a greater proportion of students can become graduates. Emotional support, financial support, experience with research, familiarity with university and college dissertation requirements, and ready access to university resources and advisors may be factors to build into a modified system to achieve a greater proportion of graduates. Seminars and support groups of different configurations have also been suggested as strategies to facilitate dissertation completion (Cesari, 1990; Dillon & Malott, n.d.). These efforts can result in greater satisfaction and a sense of achievement for the student and will have utilized university resources to their fullest in preparing new professionals for the field.

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Academic Procrastination and Perfectionism:

A Comparison of Graduates and ABDs

Kathy E. Green, Ph.D.

University of Denver

Paper presented as part of a symposium entitled "Graduates and ABDs in Colleges of Education: Characteristics and Implications for the Structure of Doctoral Programs" at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 1995, San Francisco.

Abstract

A measure based on the Boulder Model of training in clinical psychology (scientist-practitioner model) was administered via mail survey to a sample of graduates and ABD students in a College of Education (n=239). This measure has 11 subscales that assess cognitive and affective factors resulting in procrastination during the relatively unstructured dissertation phase of doctoral study. It was expected that mean scores for ABDs would exceed those for graduates. This expectation was confirmed for 8 of the 11 measure subscales, with a significant multivariate difference (effect size = .25) and 8 of 11 univariate differences significant at $p < .05$. Differences for perfectionism were not significant. Results are discussed in light of findings from clinical psychology and with regard to implications for selection and nurturing of students through the dissertation process.

Attrition from doctoral programs in education is estimated at approximately 50% (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Cesari, 1990) in comparison to completion rates of over 90% for business and law. A portion of this attrition represents self-selection as students clarify their personal goals, evaluate their skills and commitment to a course of study, and decide to follow other paths. However, about 20% of these students give up at the dissertation stage (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992), some after several years of struggle, and after a considerable investment of time and money. Failure at this point is expensive and painful for the student, discouraging for the faculty involved, and injurious to the reputation of the institution. Hence, attention has been paid to identifying variables related to delay or failure to complete a dissertation. These variables include situational, program-specific, cognitive, and affective or personality factors (e.g., Germeroth, 1990; Jacks, Chubin, Porter, & Connolly, 1983; Wagner, 1986). This study investigated the role two personological variables--procrastination and perfectionism--play in completion or noncompletion of a dissertation.

Procrastination is defined as the tendency to put off doing something until a future date, postponing or delaying needlessly. Previous research suggests that from one fourth to nearly all college students experience problems with procrastination (Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984), that the problem worsens the longer students are in college (Hill, Hill, Chabot, & Barrall, 1978), and that negative academic consequences are associated with procrastination (Rothblum, Solomon, & Murakami, 1986). Procrastination has been investigated in several domains (academic, decisional, neurotic, compulsive, life routine procrastination; Milgram, Batori, & Mowrer, 1993). Academic procrastination is of interest here. Milgram et al.'s results suggest academic procrastination to be domain rather than task specific; that is, procrastination will apply to a global area of endeavor not just to specific component tasks. Procrastinators have been found to be more test anxious, depressed, pessimistic, and perfectionistic, to have less self-efficacy, perceived control, frustration tolerance, and self-esteem, and to have greater fear of failure (Burka & Yuen, 1983; Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Ferrari, 1991; McKean, 1990; Rothblum, Solomon, & Murakami, 1986; Tuckman, 1991). There is further suggestion of an interaction with gender. These findings suggest procrastination to include affective and cognitive components rather than merely a deficit in study skills.

Milgram et al. (1993) found that procrastinators are more likely to endorse reasons for procrastination considered nonthreatening to one's self-esteem than reasons reflecting more directly on personal failings. For example, time management was endorsed more frequently than lack of academic ability as a reason for delay.

The majority of studies of procrastination have been conducted with community college students and university undergraduates. Most measures of procrastination address tasks central to course completion such as term papers and examinations. An exception is the Procrastination Inventory developed by Muszynski and Akamatsu (1991) for use with doctoral students in clinical psychology who delayed completion of their dissertation. Muszynski and Akamatsu found inventory subscales to significantly differentiate delayers and noncompleters from completers.

Perfectionism has also been noted as a barrier to project completion, often via it's place as an explanation for procrastination. Burka and Yuen (1983) suggest, for example, that procrastinators place unrealistic demands on themselves. Flett Blankstein, Hewitt, and Koledin (1992) found socially prescribed perfectionism (parents' and others expectations) to be related to the fear of failure component of procrastination. Individuals higher in perfectionism tend to have higher levels of stress and achievement motivation, to be more neurotic, avoidant, dependent, and depressed as well as to procrastinate more (Broday, 1988; Fresques, 1991; Saddler & Sacks, 1993; Slaton, 1991).

The purpose of this study was to compare dissertation completers and noncompleters (ABDs) on facets of procrastination, including perfectionism. Graduates were expected to have lower scores than ABDs on all facets of procrastination and perfectionism. Further, both graduates and ABDs were expected to endorse nonthreatening, task-specific reasons for procrastination more highly than threatening, personal ability reasons.

Method

Subjects

Participants in this study were drawn from an urban private university College of Education in a western state. This college enrolls primarily doctoral students, with a much smaller number of master's and certification students. The sample included all 154 doctoral graduates from 1988-1993 and a sample consisting of 111 students who had passed their doctoral comprehensive exams but had not completed their dissertations. The sample of students were as similar as possible to the graduate group in gender and area of study. Table 1 provides a summary of some participant characteristics.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable		Graduates	Students
Gender	Female	106 (69%)	83 (75%)
	Male	48 (31%)	28 (25%)
GRE-Verbal	Mean	526.6	549.2
	SD	86.6	89.0
GRE-Quantitative	Mean	491.9	538.9
	SD	112.7	101.9
GPA	Mean	3.8	3.9
	SD	1.4	1.4

Instrument

Participants were mailed a survey that was 12-pages in length (6 double-sized sheets) with a total of 157 closed-response questions and 1 open-ended question. The survey consisted of demographic questions, items about dissertation funding and preparation, sources of support, difficulties encountered with the dissertation, perceptions of responsibility, and a modified version of the Procrastination Inventory (Muszynski & Akamatsu, 1991). Only the Procrastination Inventory responses were analyzed for this paper.

The Procrastination Inventory contains 43 items sorted into 11 subscales. (Sample items and subscale titles are listed below in Table 2). Each item is rated on a 5-point scale on the basis of how relevant the item is/was for the person while working on the dissertation (1=not at all true of me, 5=definitely true of me). Scale scores and a total score are generated. This measure was developed to assess stresses in programs requiring development as both a scientist and a practitioner (Boulder Model). It was argued that students with applied interests may experience difficulties completing tasks requiring a scientist orientation. Items were adapted from the Procrastination Assessment Scale--Students (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984) and written to tap facets of procrastination unique to working on a dissertation.

This 43-item measure was modified for use with College of Education students by substituting "education students/graduates" for "clinical psychology students/graduates." Item wording was modified to use past tense for the graduate survey and present tense for the student survey. The revised measure was reviewed by a panel of 3 faculty, including a survey researcher, for appropriateness to a population of education students and graduates. Suggested revisions were made prior to preparation of the final version of the survey. These revisions included removal of 2 items because they were considered redundant and addition of 1 item to tap a further aspect of one subscale.

Procedure

Surveys were mailed to graduates and students in January 1994. Code numbers were assigned to surveys for follow-up purposes. All surveys were returned to a departmental secretary who recorded the survey code and routed the survey to a retired faculty member for processing. The secretary sent a second copy of the survey to nonrespondents after 3 weeks and a third copy following a second 3 week period. Surveys were returned by 142/154 of the graduates (92%) and 97/111 of the students (87%).

Results

Table 2 presents internal consistency reliabilities for the 11 subscales. Subscale reliabilities are predictably low for the subscales with only 2-4 items. While total score reliability is acceptable, it is unclear that the total forms a unidimensional whole. Rasch or factor analysis would contribute to our understanding of the structure of this measure. In this study, subscales were treated separately.

Table 2.
Sample Items and Internal Consistency Reliabilities for Procrastination Inventory Subscales

Subscale/Item	n Items	Reliability
Low Frustration Tolerance I couldn't bear working on my dissertation.	5	.34
Perfectionism I wanted my dissertation to make a significant contribution to the field.	4	.52
Rebellion I felt that they shouldn't require students to do a dissertation.	4	.59
Difficulty Making Decisions I had a hard time knowing what to include and whatnot to include in my dissertation.	2	.41
Need for Approval My advisor's approval was all-important.	2	.39
Unable to Take Help I felt that asking for help was a sign of being less than a truly competent student.	2	.38
Procrastination as a Work Style I often waited until the last minute to study for exams or write papers.	4	.53
Fear of Finishing Graduate School I feared graduation would mean losing the structure of graduate school.	3	.60
Self-Denigration My delaying on my dissertation made me question my ablity to handle such a project.	5	.68
Insufficient Reinforcement/Lack of Structure I needed to have deadlines in order to complete things.	6	.78
Task Aversiveness I worked on the dissertation so long that I lost all desire to do it.	5	.75
Total	42	.86

The univariate distribution for each subscale was examined for normality. Nine subscale scores were reasonably normally distributed and 2 (Rebellion and Fear of Finishing Graduate School) were positively skewed. Skewness was not severe enough to consider transformation for these 2 subscales. Differences in subscale scores were assessed using a multivariate analysis of variance. This test assumes multivariate normality and homogeneity of dispersion matrices. These assumptions were reasonably well met (Box's M = 77.8, $p > .25$). Scores on 8 of 11 subscales were higher for ABDs than for graduates, with a significant multivariate difference (Wilk's Lambda = .75) and significant univariate differences ($p < .05$) for 7 of 11 subscales as well as for the total score (Table 3). No interaction with gender or main effect of gender was found. Scores on perfectionism were lower for ABDs than for graduates, though the difference was not significant.

Table 3.
Means and Standard Deviations of Procrastination Inventory Subscales for Graduates and ABDs
Wilk's Lambda for Graduate/Student Effect = .75, $p < .001$,
Box's M = 77.8, $p > .25$

	Graduates		ABDs			
Subscale	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	p
Low Frustration Tolerance	2.7	.6	2.9	.7	5.9	.016
Perfectionism	3.7	.7	3.5	.7	3.2	.074
Rebellion	1.5	.6	1.7	.6	13.0	.001
Difficulty Making Decisions	2.8	1.0	3.1	1.0	5.4	.022
Need for Approval	2.9	.9	3.2	.9	3.6	.060
Unable to Take Help	1.9	.8	2.4	.9	16.2	.001
Procrastination as a Work Style	2.3	.7	2.3	.7	.0	.892
Fear of Finishing Graduate School	1.4	.7	1.4	.6	.0	.987
Self-Denigration	2.6	.8	3.0	.8	13.3	.001
Insufficient Reinforcement /Lack of Structure	2.0	.8	2.8	.9	45.4	.001
Task Aversiveness	2.3	.8	2.8	.8	18.1	.001
Total Score	2.3	.4	2.6	.5	31.5	.001

Note. The rating scale used had 5 points (1 = not at all descriptive to 5 = definitely descriptive).

It was hypothesized that reasons for procrastination less threatening to one's self-esteem would be endorsed more strongly than less personally acceptable reasons. Items were categorized as least and most threatening to one's self-esteem as follows: Categorized as least threatening, and so hypothesized as more likely to be strongly endorsed, were 6 items that dealt with the nature of the task rather than with personal skills. Categorized as more threatening were 6 items related to personal ablity. Two aggregate scores were created for each person (most threatening and least threatening). Differences between most and least threatening reasons were assessed separately for graduates and for ABDs using paired t-tests. Differences were significant for students (Mean for Most = 2.9, Mean for Least = 2.4, $t = 5.2$, $p = .001$) and not for graduates, but differences were not in the expected direction. Students endorsed the more threatening items at a higher level than less threatening items; in this sample, subjects blamed themselves more than they blamed the task or university structure for their procrastination.

Students were classified by length of time since passing their comprehension examinations (less than 3 years, 4-5 years, and over 5 years). There were no significant differences among these groups in any procrastination subscale score.

A supplementary analysis was conducted to investigate whether there were differences in procrastination subscale scores across programs of study in the College of Education. Programs were grouped as Educational Administration/Higher Education, Educational Psychology, Counseling

Psychology, and Curriculum Leadership. A significant multivariate effect of program area was found (Wilk's Lambda = .72, $p < .02$), with significant univariate differences for Low Frustration Tolerance, Difficulty Making Decisions, Need for Approval, Self-Denigration, and Insufficient Reinforcement. Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations by program area for these subscales broken down by graduate and student classification. Scores of both graduates and students in counseling psychology tended to be lower than those of graduates and students in other areas; scores for students in curriculum leadership tended to be highest. This could be partly due to the presence of an off-campus doctoral cohort in curriculum leadership. This group is geographically distant from the College and may experience a greater sense of isolation.

Table 4.
Means and Deviations of Procrastination Inventory Subscales by Program Area by Graduate/Student Status
Wilk's Lambda for Program Area Effect = .72, $p < .02$,
Box's M = 583.6 $p > .07$

	HE		Ed Psych		Coun Psy		CURL	
Subscale	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Low Frustration Tolerance[a]								
Graduates	2.7	.7	2.8	.7	2.6	.4	2.7	.4
Students	2.7	.6	3.1	.8	2.2	.4	3.2	.7
Difficulty Making Decisions								
Graduates	2.6	1.1	3.3	1.0	2.9	.8	2.8	1.2
Students	2.8	.8	3.2	1.0	2.3	1.3	3.3	1.0
Need for Approval								
Graduates	2.7	.9	3.6	.9	2.5	.8	3.0	.9
Students	3.2	.8	3.0	.7	2.6	1.1	3.2	1.0
Self-Denigration								
Graduates	2.5	.9	3.1	1.0	2.5	.5	2.6	.8
Students	3.0	.8	3.1	.9	2.2	.8	3.3	.7
Insufficient Reinforcement								
Graduates	2.1	.9	2.3	.9	2.0	.6	2.0	.7
Students	2.5	.8	2.8	.9	2.1	.5	3.3	.8

Note. The rating scale used had 5 points (1 = not at all descriptive to 5 = definitely descriptive).
[a]All differences across program area are significant at $p < .05$.

Discussion

Measurement concerns exist with an instrument containing so few items per subscale. Analysis of the measure's structure would be useful, possibly with deletion of some subscales and expansion of others. Merely adding conceptually similar items to subscales would be likely to provide a measure which could encompass a wider range of responses.

Differences between graduates and ABDs were generally in the expected direction. Muszynski and Akamatsu (1991) found higher scores for dissertation delayers than for completers in clinical psychology on 5 of 6 of the same subscales. They found no differences in perfectionism, congruent with the results found here. They further found no main or interactive effect of gender. Flett et al. (1992) argue that the relationship between perfectionism and procrastination is more complex than previously believed, and that relationships exist only among subcomponents of each of these two constructs. In contrast to Milgram et al.'s (1993) results, the procrastinators in this study were more likely to endorse personal versus task difficulties as reasons for procrastination. The disparity may come in the differing nature of the

samples. Milgram et al. enlisted Israeli college preparatory students who were initially low achievers. The sample in the present study were older and were high achievers.

Procrastination is associated with negative academic consequences. Interventions for procrastination have included study skills counseling and the introduction of external structure and contingencies. Rothblum, Solomon, and Murakami (1986) argue that due to negative affective factors associated with procrastination, these interventions may be insufficient. Results of the present study would support that argument. While structuring the task might be useful, ABDs in this study reported personal skill deficits at a stronger level than task complaints. It might be useful in planning for an individual doctoral student to assess whether that person is avoidant due to task or due to internal reasons, or both.

Extent of control of a project has been found to be associated with difficulty in project completion (Rennie & Brewer, 1987). This is supported by positive results found with self-paced scheduling versus instructor-imposed scheduling in undergraduate classes (Roberts, Fulton, & Semb, 1988). These results argue for integration of student-designed reinforcements or incentives in the dissertation process. Incentives could be formal passage of a series of landmark events (such as completing the proposal, obtaining approval from the human subjects review board, presenting the planned study at a brown-bag faculty-student lunch, submission of a dissertation progress log periodically, etc.), completion of a required research seminar for ABDs, completion and approval of a dissertation proposal prior to leaving the university, or attendance at faculty-ABD student meetings.

Group sessions using cognitive restructuring and stress/time management have been successful in ameliorating procrastination behavior. Franek (1982) included discussion of time management, negative emotions, motivational strategies, advisor-student relationships, and writer's block in a 4-session program. Students remaining ABD for more than a year, or some other determined length of time, could be encouraged to participate in such a program. If students likely to fail to complete their dissertation could be identified early in their doctoral program, they could be directed to such a program earlier in their academic career or could at least be advised of the potential problems facing someone with their profile.

Selection of students based on their likelihood of completion is not at present typically necessary or recommended. If university resources were to be reduced, however, student positions may be limited and thus an evaluation of the student's procrastination behavior indicated. Prospective studies of the predictive validity of the Procrastination Inventory would be needed prior to its use in this manner.

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Factors Affecting the Completion of the Doctoral Dissertation For Non-Traditional Aged Women

Kathryn Lenz, Ph.D.

University of Denver

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Abstract

Many students who enter Ph.D. programs never complete the degree. Non-completion of a doctoral program has impact on individuals and their families, universities, and society.

Individuals who complete all their coursework and pass their comprehensive examination are sometimes labeled ABD, that is "All But Dissertation." Many ABDs are non-traditional age, academically able women.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that inhibited or enabled the completion of a doctoral dissertation for non-traditional age women in a Ph.D. program in education. A mixed design looked at the issues surrounding the dissertation process. Six case studies were employed to structure the study; three women "completers" and three ABD women. Semi-structured interviews with the participants and "others" were used to gather data. Quantitative data were gleaned from the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale by Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990) and from academic records of the participants. A conceptual framework consisting of the perfectionism phenomenon and the self-in-relation theory served to guide the research. The conceptual framework and a thematic analysis were used to examine the data.

The data suggested the following factors acted to enable "completers": a stimulating, exciting topic, a caring advisor, and family and peer support. Inhibiting factors for the ABDs seemed to be the absence of: a strong dissertation topic, a solid advisor-advisee relationship, and an active support network. Time and money constrained ABDs.

Both "completers" and ABDs seemed to exhibit perfectionism traits but the "completers" were able to overcome the blocking perfectionistic traits with the support they received. ABDs did not seem to have that support. Perfectionism traits acted as enablers and inhibitors depending on the person.

The self-in-relation theory suggested that women develop through their relationships. The relationships the doctoral candidates established seemed to affect completion of their dissertations. The researcher called these aspects of the self-in-relation theory positive and negative input, therefore inhibiting their dissertation progress. The "completers" had much more positive input, making it possible for them to finish their dissertations.

Introduction

Thousands of men and women enter doctoral programs every year. Many of those entering students never complete the Ph.D program (Sternberg, 1981; Digest of Education Statistics, 1992). When individuals do not complete the Ph.D.,society loses the benefits of possible contributions from those individuals. Non-completion has an impact on the individuals as well as it may result in a lower self-esteem and a less prestigious standing in one's chosen career. Losses of promotional opportunities and lower salary are also possible consequences of non-completion.

Individuals who complete all the coursework for the Ph.D. program and successfully pass the comprehensive examination are sometimes labeled ABD, that is, "All But Dissertation" (Sternberg, 1981). Many ABDs are women (Hanson, 1992) and many of these are academically able. The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influence the completion or non-completion of the doctoral dissertation of non-traditional age academically able women.

According to the Digest of Education Statistics (1992, p. 174), the number of women over the age of 35 enrolled in institutions of higher education has more than tripled since 1970. If in fact more women over the age of 35 are enrolling in graduate programs as well, then why are more women not completing the Ph.D? Educational policy makers, university administrators and faculty, and families of academically able women are concerned that the individual and society are suffering because the feminine half of the population is educationally underdeveloped and underutilized (Eccles, 1985). Society with its myriad of problems in social, environmental, and political arenas cannot afford to waste or lose possible contributions from able women. There are no statistics showing exactly how many ABDs are women, however, if these women could complete a doctoral degree, the credibility assigned to the Ph.D. degree might allow women the social and political influence to help generate change.

Frequently academically able non-traditional age women strive to reach their potential by returning to college to pursue advanced degrees. Many complete the appropriate coursework and pass the comprehensive examination but then get "stuck" at the ABD stage. The problem this research proposed to examine was why some non-traditional age women who have successfully completed coursework and the comprehensive examination do not write a doctoral dissertation required for the completion of the Ph.D. degree.

Research Questions

The researcher investigated the following questions:

1) What factors enabled or inhibited the completion of the dissertation as perceived by the non-traditional age women who completed the degree, hereafter labeled completers, and women who did not complete the degree, hereafter labled as ABDs?

a) How did the completers choose their dissertation topic?

b) How did the completers choose their dissertation committee chairperson?

c) How perfectionistic were the completers in doing the dissertation as measured through written survey?

d) How perfectionistic were the completers in doing the dissertation as perceived through interview data?

e) How did the completers perceive the advisor's role in finishing the dissertation?

f) How did the completers feel about spouses, family, and peer supporters during the dissertation process?

2)How did the factors that influenced the Ph.D.s compare to the factors that influenced the ABDs on:

a)support from others during the dissertation process,

b) perfectionism scale scores,

c) indications of differing academic ability as measured through transcripts, GRE scores, and advisor evaluation.

3) Did one or a combination of two perspectives, the self-in-relation theory or the perfectionism phenomenon, seem to enable or inhibit the completion of the doctoral dissertation? Was there another theory that might more clearly explain what the data indicate enabled or inhibited the completion of the doctoral dissertation?

Conceptual Framework

A review of the literature suggested non-traditional aged women may have different sets of problems when writing a dissertation. Family pressures are often relieved through the efforts of the female head of the household. And many of the everyday tasks of running a home more often fall to women than men (Seeborg, 1990). The situation in which a non-traditional aged woman is older than her advisor may also create special problems around role reversal issues (Sandler, 1993).

Women faculty members mentioned the importance of personal relationships in providing support for their work (Chamberlain, 1988). It would seem logical to apply the same importance of personal relationships to the work of women doctoral candidates, namely, the work of completing a dissertation. Institutional support systems seem to exist more readily for men. Women must go about creating their own support networks (Simeone, 1987). Support groups appeared to be important to completers in the work done by Stalker (1991).

Women working to achieve high standards of performance may suffer from perfectionism. Enhanced sensitivity, the need to relate to others, and responsivity to the expectations of others may exaggerate the effects of the desire to please others. To please others, for a perfectionist, means one must be perfect (Bell, 1990).

Women often have no yardstick against which to measure their competence, especially in situations where there are no female role models (Bell, 1990). This lack of role models may encourage perfectionism in women who strive for unrealistic goals and try to achieve them perfectly.

Germeroth (1991) found two main themes related to dissertation writing and perfectionism: the candidate decides not to begin until she knows the product will be perfect and the candidate is paralyzed by criticism of her writing. In her study of 132 Ph.D.s and Ed.D.s of which 55 were female, Germeroth (1991) found that women were significantly more likely to let their own perfectionism inhibit the completion of the dissertation than were the men in the study.

Using the literature review as a guide, perfectionism and the self-in-relation theory were selected to be the conceptual framework for the study. The following section will explain what these schema mean and how they fit into the analysis of the data for this study.

The self is a "construct useful in describing the organization of a person's experience and construction of reality which illuminates the purpose and directionality of her or his behavior" (Surrey, 1991, p. 52). It seems valid to ponder how the development of self might fit into the dissertation process in non-traditional age women. Is self development pertinent to the ability to finish a dissertation? Might significant others or spouses in the Ph.D. candidate's life influence the dissertation process?

Theories in the development of self including: Freud, Erikson, Levinson, and McClelland, tend to view human development as a process of separation (Gilligan, 1982). The process of separation and subsequent independence has formed the precondition for mental health in our culture. The theory of development based on separation was devised by men based almost exclusively on research using male samples. As a result, the differences observed in normal female development have been seen as abnormal. In 1974, Chodorow argued that females develop normally through a different process (Chodorow, 1974). This process of development later became known as the self-in-relation theory.

Jean Miller's (1976) work has helped theorists move away from the deficiency, abnormal model for female development to a model which values women's strengths. A central theme in the construction of the feminine self, as illustrated in the self-in-relation theory, is that "women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliation and relationships" (Miller, 1976, p. 83). Current feminine theorists have elaborated on Miller's ideas (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Surrey, 1993). Gilligan (1982), for example, described the development of the female self as a fusion of identity and intimacy.

In summary, the self-in-relation theory involves a shift of emphasis in human development, especially in women, from separation from others to relationships with others. According to the self-in-relation theory, the primary experience of self for women and its full development, including creativity, autonomy of person, and assertion, emerge through the context of relationships (Surrey, 1991).

In this study, relationships with others in the participants' lives were examined as to the role they played in the completion or non-completion of the dissertation. Interviews were conducted to assess the effect advisor, family members, significant others or spouses, and peers had on the dissertation process.

Perfectionism was the second part of the conceptual framework for this study. "Perfectionism is consciously and unconsciously built into the very cultural, psychological, and religious foundations of our achievement-oriented upbringing" (Hendlin, 1992, p. 5). Because perfectionism is such a part of our culture, it seems that it may play a role in the ABD phenomenon.

Perfectionism seems indigenous to the human condition as seen in our religions and culture but as a multidimensional construct has no clear definition (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). It is often defined by describing the behavior observed in perfectionistic people. Several behavioral features of perfectionism are: setting excessively high personal standards of performance (Frost et al., 1990; Pacht, 1984), fear of making mistakes (Pacht, 1984), doubting the quality of one's performance (Hamachek, 1978), delaying the start or completion of a task (Frost et al., 1990; Hamachek, 1978; Reed, 1985), and over-emphasing the organization and precision of a task. Of these characteristics of perfectionist behavior, two seem to dominate the personalities of people in the research done by Frost et al. (1990), setting excessively high standards of performance and being overly concerned with making mistakes. Could these factors affect the completion of the doctoral dissertation?

Hamachek (1978) further investigated the difference between perfectionists who succeed and those who do not. In examining the difference between those who succeed in a given task and those who are paralyzed by it, Hamachek (1978) drew a distinction between normal and neurotic perfectionists. Normal perfectionists set high standards for themselves but are flexible enough to let the situation guide reasonable behavior. In contrast, neurotic perfectionists set very high standards but allow little latitude for mistakes (Hamachek, 1978).

For the women in this study an added dimension of juggling many roles and doing a perfect job in all of the roles may lead to the Superwoman Syndrome (Hendlin,1992). In the Superwoman Syndrome all roles are attempted, nothing is left out. The woman who strives to maintain a perfect home, create a perfect marriage, be a perfect mother and sister, and write the perfect dissertation on the perfect topic may find avoidance or dropping out the best way to handle the situation. By interviewing the participants, their families, and advisors and through the administration of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990) factors became evident that influenced the completion or non-completion of the dissertation.

Method

Doing research "is in many ways like taking a descriptive and explanatory snapshot of reality" (Crabtree and Miller, 1992, p. 3). For a detailed description of the reality of how non-traditional age women finish or do not finish a doctoral dissertation a mixed design study was chosen. A mixed design permitted the researcher to capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research procedures to gather data. Semi-structured interviews, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, and academic records were the main sources of data in the study.

Multiple case studies were utilized in this study. Yin (1989) reminded researchers that case studies may include qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering methods. Case study research is an in-depth, intensive examination of particular cases in an attempt to develop and understand universal principles (Moon, 1991). The dissertation experience of each of the six participants was recorded in full context. The information was then transcribed and analyzed for common themes.

A single case study is intended to highlight the details of an individual's experiences. The logic of the multiple case study design is replication logic not sampling logic (Yin, 1989). Cross-case evidence in a multiple case study lends credibility to the outcome. A multiple case study is more robust than a single case study (Moon, 1991). Additions to existing theory may result as suggested through grounded theory logic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The semi-structured interview was selected for the primary data gathering tool in this study to allow the participants to help guide the outcome of the interview. The questions and possible probes were written in an interview guide which was used with the intention of being flexible during the actual interview. The researcher followed the lead of the participant within the interview guide structure, whenever appropriate, to gain pertinent information about the dissertation process. This type of interview fit the needs of the

researcher to probe for information pertaining to perfectionism and the self-in-relation theory but permitted the participant to tell her "story."

The primary purpose of the interviews was to gather in-depth, rich information from each participant about her dissertation experience. Each woman's feelings of frustration, elation, success or failure were recorded as she related her own experience in her own "voice."

In this study, the interview guide permitted the participant's open-ended remarks to lead both the researcher and the participant into interesting and pertinent territory. A basic assumption of this qualitative methodology was that the participant's perception of the dissertation writing process would unfold throughout the interview process as the participant perceived it, not as the researcher hoped the participant perceived it (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Interview Schedule

Three 45 minute interviews were conducted with each subject. The purpose of the first interview was to establish rapport with the subject and gather general background information. The second interview probed the components of the conceptual framework, perfectionism and the self-in-relation information. The final interview was used to gather information that had not been volunteered and brought closure to the study. Each interview was audio-taped. The subject chose the place for the interview and a time convenient for her. When possible, the interviews were held in three consecutive weeks.

Interviews were also conducted with the spouse or significant other of each participant, family members, support peers, and a dissertation advisor when applicable. Interview guides were used for each of these groups as well.

The Participants

The participants in the study were selected from a pool of non-traditional age women graduate students in the College of Education of a small mid-western university. Of the university's total enrollment of 7,000 students about 1,700 were non-traditional graduate students. The College of Education, from which the participants were drawn, has a full-time regular faculty of 18. There were 240 on-campus Ph.D. students and 140 Master's Degree students in the College of Education.

Two groups of women were chosen for the study. Each group consisted of three participants. All of those selected met the requirements for admission to the college of education at the university. Each participant had successfully passed the written comprehensive examination as required by the graduate department.

One group of three women, called completers, had finished their Ph.D.s and the other group of three women, called ABDs, had not completed their doctoral degrees. The Ph.D. subjects had completed the degree no more than 5 years before the study. The ABD women were chosen from a pool of Ph.D. candidates in education who had successfully completed their written comprehensive examinations more than 1 year before the study but had not completed the written dissertation. All subjects were at least 35 years of age. This age criterion appeared to screen out those students who had had a continuous academic career, in other words the participants were non-traditional age. The original criteria did not include women majoring in School Administration. The researcher intended to match ABD students to Ph.D. participants on family structure, GRE scores and majors.

The selection process started about two months before interviewing was to begin with a letter from the researcher to department chairs asking for names of possible participants. Several names of possible participants were returned to the researcher from this initial inquiry. They were contacted by telephone, the researcher explained the study, and if they were interested in being a participant; they were sent consent forms. Several department chairs felt confidentiality would be breeched if they released names of possible participants.

Because there had not been sufficient response, at that time a letter was sent from the Dean of the College of Education to several ABDs asking them to call the researcher if they would be interested in being a participant in the study. This search, combined with names from department chairs, resulted in a total of three ABDs. Completers were located through suggestions from advisors and personal contacts of the researcher. From this process, three ABDs and three completers were recruited to be participants in the study. Two other possible participants agreed to participate, received consent forms, but backed away from the commitment at the last minute. The reasons for withdrawal from the study were given as "the study

seems too invasive" and "it looks like it would involve too much of my family's time and a case study makes me feel uncomfortable and vulnerable." Several completers chose not to be involved with the study with the only explanation being "I just can't talk about it yet."

Since participants were so difficult to locate, the criteria were expanded from not including the School Administration major to including a participant whose major was School Administration. Also the intention to match completers and ABDs on family structure, GRE scores, and majors was abandoned. Because Grade Point Averages were not available for the participants, this criterion was deleted also. Observed intellectual and behavioral characteristics were added as a way to identify giftedness. Several experts in gifted education were interviewed, their observations of giftedness were included in the interview data (Feldhusen & Baska, 1989). This differed from the original criteria. The whole process of finding cooperative participants for the study was frustratingly slow and difficult.

All participants were at least 35 years old to qualify for the non-traditional age requirement. The completers had finished the Ph.D. degree no more than five years prior to the study. The ABDs had successfully passed the written comprehensive examination as administered through her department and all of the ABD participants had been ABD for at least five years. Participants willingly gave at least 3 hours of their time for interview purposes and signed release forms for the researcher to examine their academic records and GRE scores as well as their ratings on the written comprehensive examination.

Data and Results

Tables 1 and 2 give, at a glance, the demographics and GRE scores of the six participants.

Table 1. Demographic Data on the Completers and the ABDs

Name	Status	Age	Program	Family	Advisor	Friend
Ann	Ph.D.	46	Sch. Psych.	2 child	1	acd
Felicia	Ph.D.	42	Sch. Psych.	3 child	co	acd.
Martha	Ph.D.	38	Sch. Psych.	spouse step	co	non
Ellen	ABD	42	Sch. Psych.	step & own	1	acd.
Sally	ABD	43	Sch. Ad.	sign. other	1	acd.
Rachael	ABD	53	Cr. Ld	not curr	0	acd.

Family - number of children, spouse only or significant other only; step-step children and own child; not curr.- not currently
Friend - academic or non-academic
Sch Psych. - School Psychology
Cr. Ld. - Curriculum Leadership
Sch Ad. - School Administration

Table 2. GRE Scores and Ratings on Comps for ABDs and Completers

Name	Birthdate	GRE verbal	GRE quant	Comps
Ann Ph.D	1949	520	500	Pass
Felicia Ph.D	1950	440	510	Pass
Martha Ph.D.	1956	620	540	Honors Pass
Ellen ABD	1952	630	500	Pass
Sally ABD.	1951	670	580	Pass
Rachael ABD	1941	790	800	Honors Pass

Analysis

The analysis of the data was directed by the research questions, the conceptual framework, and themes imposed on the data by the researcher. The interviews with participants provided most of the data

but interviews with others in the lives of the women were also part of the analysis. The perspective of the others provided additional information about the dissertation process for each participant thereby helping to triangulate the data. The analysis also included the examination of quantitative information gathered through tabulation of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale and information gleaned from each participant's academic records including GRE scores and each woman's rating on the written comprehensive examination.

Themes

Incidents gathered from the interviews were coded into categories or themes. Wolcott (1994a) wrote that themes are not discovered in the data but rather are imposed on the data by the researcher. By pulling themes from the data, however, the gathered data were more focused (Eisner, 1991). Themes represented recurring messages heard in the interviews and seen in the quantitative data. Materials presented in the write-up illuminated the themes the researcher selected (Eisner, 1991).

The recurring themes gleaned from the interview and quantitative data, apart from perfectionism and the self-in-relation theory, were as follows:

- Importance of dissertation topic,
- Advisor,
- Family and peer support,
- Time, and
- Money.

Importance of dissertation topic

The completers unanimously agreed that the dissertation topic was of critical importance to the completion of their dissertations. Martha and Ann had selected topics that were personally and professionally important to them, while Felicia had chosen a topic that would enhance her personal and professional growth. Felicia needed to chose a new topic and a new advisor because of a health crisis, but she persisted and completed the new dissertation. Both Martha and Ann had successfully tied their dissertation topics to work environment situations.

The women who had not completed their dissertations had found selection of a topic very difficult. All three had tried to connect their topics for dissertation with their work environments and this had caused concern with advisors. None of the ABDs had been successful in selecting a topic that was personally and professionally challenging and exciting.

Importance of Advisor

Martha and Felicia had some difficulties with advisor relationships but they worked through those problems by selecting a co-advisor. They perceived the problem as one they could solve and they did solve it successfully. The completers had chosen at least one advisor who was caring, patient, and kind. The support received through the advisor seemed to enhance the self-concepts of the women and help to eliminate some of their feelings of vulnerability.

The ABD women had experienced a great deal of disappointment surrounding their advisor-advisee relationships. All three had advisors leave the university and they said that re-establishment of a new advisor-advisee relationship had been a significantly inhibiting factor in their dissertation progress.

Family and peer support

Completers received the emotional support they needed in many ways. Martha asked for and received support from her husband, her parents, her sisters, her brother, and her friends, as well as her advisor. Ann built a strong network of friends who supported her through the dissertation process and she counted on the support of her advisor as well. Felicia drew from her inner resources for self-support, and received good support from her husband. She also received support from at least one of her co-advisors.

The women who were ABDs found themselves in situations that provided some support but possibly not enough of the right kind of support was given. Ellen and Sally had significant others who

thought they were giving support but probably were not giving it in the right ways. Rachael had no organized network of support. Her father wanted her to complete her degree but there may have been other family concerns that prohibited Rachael from seeing that support as positive.

Time

Ann and Felicia did not work outside their homes while doing their dissertations. Martha did work full-time while doing her dissertation. Of course, finding the time to complete a dissertation was a problem for all three women, but they were well-organized and this probably helped them to prioritize their schedules so that the dissertation work moved forward.

The ABDs complained about the lack of time for doing their dissertation work. Each had a reason or excuse why she did not have enough time to finish her dissertation. All three ABDs worked fulltime outside the home making carving out time for dissertation work a difficult task.

Money

Martha needed to work while she completed her dissertation, however she did not use lack of money as an excuse not to finish. Ann and Felicia did not work outside the home while doing their dissertations.

All three ABDs said they needed to work full-time. This in their eyes prohibited work on their dissertations.

Conceptual Framework

Perfectionism

In comparing completers to ABDs on the Multidimensional Perfectionism scale scores and the interview data suggested that:

- Felicia was a balanced perfectionist, at least at the close of her dissertation process,
- Ann was an unbalanced perfectionist but moved toward a more balanced perfectionistic attitude as she worked through her dissertation,
- Martha moved from being an unbalanced perfectionist to a balanced perfectionist through the dissertation process.

The data suggested that the completers learned to use their traits of perfectionism to enable them to complete their dissertations. The data about the women who remained ABD suggested that:

- Ellen was an unbalanced perfectionist whose traits inhibited her dissertation progress,
- Rachael was a balanced perfectionist,
- Sally was an unbalanced perfectionist.

However, there was no consistency in the triangulation of the data. The traits of doubt about quality of performance, concerns about making mistakes and procrastination were inhibiting traits that may have blocked the women's progress with their dissertations.

Self-in-Relation Theory

All three completers asked for and received a great deal of emotional and practical support throughout their dissertation writing processes. This suggested a positive input from their relationships. The women received positive support from different sources but they were all supported continually as they did their dissertation work. The relationships they established or reinforced during their dissertations were very important to them. The researcher clumped these relationships into the positive self-in-relation category.

The women who were ABD did not establish support systems for themselves during their dissertation work. Rachael spoke of no real community within the university structure, neither Sally nor Ellen felt closely connected to their advisors or to a university support system. These women had questionable support from family and friends. This has been named negative self-in-relation input because the relationships appeared to draw the woman away from her dissertation rather than encouraging her to embrace the dissertation experience and finish it.

Conclusions

The discrepancies that appeared throughout the study within the triangulation scheme may raise questions about the participants responses or the instruments. However, the similarities of the perfectionism traits among the six participants were extraordinary. All of the participants exhibited some perfectionism traits but the completers appeared to be able to move beyond the blocks created by their perfectionism to complete their dissertations. The data suggested the completers had much more positive self-in-relation input from their relationships. Positive support from family, friends, and advisor was an important enabling factor for the completers.

In the analysis of the academic records, the two cohorts were very similar. The data suggested the scores on the GRE did not predict completion of the Ph.D., at least for this group of women.

All of the participants had remarkably similar experiences with dissertation topic problems and advisors yet the completers were able to persevere. In one case it was necessary for the completer to choose an entirely different dissertation topic and advisor and begin anew, but the completer stuck with it and finished it. The completers did not give up.

A major difference in the two cohorts was that the completers accepted responsibility for their own dissertations. They did not expect the university nor their advisors to provide the energy or motivation that enabled them to finish. They accepted the challenge of a dissertation and worked to find ways to finish it. They felt the major responsibility for their dissertations rested with them while the ABDs tended to feel the university should do more to help candidates finish their dissertations.

All participants and the data surrounding their dissertation experiences were examined. Intra-case analyses were done as well as cross-case analyses. The suggestions given here are the opinions of the researcher based on the data collected. If others analyzed the same data they might come to different conclusions. Also it should be remembered when using interview data, analysis depends on the honesty and forthrightness of the interviewees.

Like Wolcott (1990), fear creeps in that the researcher has not gotten it quite right. However, Wolcott (1990) also reminded us that the participants of the study may not have gotten things right either. With these caveats in mind, the summary of the study reflected the researcher's opinions on what the data suggested were the strongest issues. Objectivity was not a criterion as much as rigorous subjectivity (Wolcott, 1990).

Extensions to the conceptual framework components were suggested by the findings of the study. An extension to the perfectionism component was that participants were greatly influenced by their perception of the traits of perfectionism. Perfectionistic traits were found in all the participants. But the traits appeared to be enabling for the completers and inhibiting for the ABDs. It seemed to depend upon the perceptions of the participants whether the trait was inhibiting or enabling. Further suggested by the data was that emotional support appeared to help break through the inhibiting nature of the perfectionistic traits for the completers.

The self-in-relation theory extensions were named positive self-in-relation input and negative self-in-relation input. The completers experienced positive self-in-relation input which enabled them to finish their dissertation work. However, the ABDs seemed to receive negative self-in-relation input which inhibited their dissertation progress. This negative input seemed to pull them away from their dissertation work. Positive self-in-relation input was enabling, negative self-in-relation input was inhibiting. Relationships remained important to all the participants, it was the nature of the relationships that seemed to affect the dissertation work.

A summary of the themes affecting the completion or non-completion of a doctoral dissertation suggested there were definite differences between completers and ABDs in how the dissertation process was perceived and therefore handled. The **dissertation topic** was perceived by all as critical to completion of a dissertation. The completers had experienced set-backs in their dissertation topic selections but had forged ahead to choose a new topic or made adjustments in the topic. The ABDs reported frustrations with their dissertation topics but had permitted those problems to block their dissertation progress.

The importance of a suitable **advisor** was very important for the completers and appeared to be inhibiting for the ABDs. An established advisor-advisee relationship seemed vital to the dissertation process. The ABDs had lost their advisor-advisee relationships and had not been able to re-connect with

anyone at the university to establish a new advisor-advisee relationship. The completers remarked about the importance of an advisor being kind and caring as well as being well informed about the dissertation process.

Family and peer support were important to the completion of a dissertation. This was called positive self-in-relation input. This support proved to be very enabling for the completers. The researcher felt the absence of positive self-in-relation input was an inhibiting factor for ABDs. Their relationships seemed to provide negative self-in-relation input thereby drawing them away from their dissertation work.

Time and money were concerns for ABDs as well as completers. Those who finished their dissertations seemed to carve out the time for work on the dissertation while the ABDs seemed to use it as an excuse not to work on their dissertations. Money was a concern, however, Martha (completer) wanted the degree so badly she worked several jobs to make it become a reality for her.

Implications and Recommendations

Candidates

Recommendations to non-traditional female candidates working on their doctoral dissertations cover a wide range of issues. Some of those issues for the candidate include:

- Examining her passion in the education arena and being ready to xplore her ideas for possible dissertation topics with an advisor,
- Being aware early in the graduate school experience that the dissertation belongs to her and the search for topic ideas and advisor assistance should begin as soon as she enters a Ph.D. program,
- Asking questions of graduate students and faculty about how the dissertation process works.
- Being assertive in questioning the research interests of faculty with the intention of selecting an advisor whose interests dovetail with her interests,
- Trying to be involved in a research project before it's time to do her own dissertation research,
- Making the effort to get to know the faculty which should help in selecting a dissertation advisor and for locating additional faculty help during the dissertation process,
- Keeping an open mind for dissertation topics and keeping an on-going list of dissertation ideas as graduate coursework procedes,
- Understanding her own needs and making them known to advisors early in the dissertation situation,
- Asking for help during the dissertation process; help at home, help in reading drafts, and help with child care issues, and
- Trying to maintain a "regular" life outside the dissertation process. One suggestion of an advisor was to keep leisure, light reading materials on hand during the dissertation process for resting the weary mind.

Family Members and Friends

Recommendations for family and friends center around support for the candidate in any way she feels is appropriate. Following are some suggestions for family members and friends of a Ph.D. candidate writing her dissertation:

- Offer empathic understanding and tons of listening,
- Let her know your relationship is in balance now and will be after her dissertation is done,
- Take over the social aspects of your relationship for a few months,
- Be supportive by giving her time away from household chores,
- Give her a sabbatical from her job, if at all possible, and
- Do not sabatoge her dissertation work by urging her away from it through guilt or shame.

Faculty and Advisors

Faculty and dissertation advisors have a great deal of influence on doctoral candidates. Some suggestions for faculty and advisors on helping non-traditional age women finish their doctoral dissertations are:

- Establish collegial relationships with the women early in the Ph.D. experience (Over brown bag lunches an easy-going student faculty rapport could be established that might foster the strong relationship needed later for dissertation work.),
- Discuss on-going faculty research with students which may help them to select dissertation advisors,
- Feel complimented when a candidate asks you to be her advisor, she is trusting you with probably one of the most important projects she has ever undertaken,
- Remember, candidates may view you as a role model; please take that role seriously,
- Try to establish a kind, caring yet professional relationship with your advisee,
- Make the dissertation experience as positive as possible; it should not be an adversarial one,
- Promptly return corrected dissertation drafts,
- Help candidates deal positively with perfectionistic traits and help them move beyond the blocks the traits may create. This may mean taking the initiative sometimes in setting deadlines and scheduling meetings, and
- Be an expert on the dissertation process at your university.

University Administration

Recommendations for how the university administration might help non-traditional age women finish their dissertations include:

- Work to create a community within the university or college that would support doctoral students,
- Provide formal support groups for interested Ph.D. students, and
- Encourage graduate student-faculty research teams.

Many university faculty members and administrators are concerned about the large number of ABDs. The recommendations made by the candidates and others in the study seemed to indicate there were measures that could be taken by the university system and faculty members that could help the candidate finish her dissertation.

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ABD Status and Degree Completion: A Student's Perspective

Margaret M. Miller

University of Denver

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Abstract

Student persistence theory emphasizes undergraduate persistence models. Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of graduate persistence extends the theory to graduate students. Although over 80% of ABD students achieve the degree, this proportion of students is decreasing (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1994). Reasons for leaving a doctoral program without degree completion rest largely with the student's relationship with the adviser, financial considerations, and personal problems. Three types of doctoral students are presented in this paper along with an assessment of the stages of doctoral completion which cause delays for the students or lead to non-completion of the degree.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the doctoral student whose coursework has been completed (ABD), specifically the amount of time necessary to finish a doctoral degree and the factors influencing completion of the degree once ABD status has been attained. First, a literature overview presents the theoretical models of student attrition as well as a summary of relevant doctoral completion literature. Second, the author's personal experiences with doctoral candidates in various stages of dissertation writing suggest three "types" of doctoral candidates with differing likelihoods for completion and the prevailing reasons for dissertation delay or noncompletion.

Models and Literature Regarding Student Persistence

In this section undergraduate and graduate models of student persistence are presented. Although this paper focuses on graduate student degree completion, examination of the undergraduate models leads to a better foundation for the review and development of a graduate degree attrition model. In addition, literature regarding ABD status and doctoral degree completion is included in this section.

Undergraduate Models of Student Persistence

Models of student attrition for undergraduate students reveal many factors associated with undergraduate student retention. In a review of literature about students who leave college, Tinto (1975) suggested that the decision regarding degree persistence lies in the degree of congruency between the student and the institution. In this model, the student's commitment to the institution reflects the degree to which the student's motivation and academic ability match the institution's academic and social characteristics. The greater the similarity between the student's and the institution's goals, the more likely the student is to persist. Tinto's (1993)own model of undergraduate persistence reflects the different stages of the undergraduate experience, and presents five factors which ultimately lead to the decision to persist or to leave. The first factor is pre-entry attributes: student background, skills and abilities, and prior educational experiences. The second factor consists of initial student goals and commitments: intention to persist, goals regarding the institution, and external commitments. The third factor comprises the institutional experiences: the academic (formal and informal) and the social (formal, extracurricular and informal, peer group experiences). The fourth factor is academic and social integration. The fifth factor echoes the second factor, ongoing student goals and commitments by which the model allows for changing goals and commitments throughout the academic career.

Bean and Metzner's (1985) undergraduate attrition model focused on non-traditional (older, part-time, and/or commuter) students. The distinguishing feature between this theoretical model and Tinto's (1975) relies on the "environmental press", internal and external factors facing non-traditional students. The internal factors, related directly to the institution, include less interaction within the college environment (with peers, faculty, and extra-curricular activities) and an exclusion from class-related activities geared to traditional students. The external factors, unrelated directly to the institution, focus on a much greater association with the noncollegiate, external environment (employment, family, adult peers). The variables in this model include demographic data, academic concerns, psychological factors, gpa, environment variables, and social integration. The social integration variables, important in Tinto's (1975) model, contribute only minimally to this model. The environment variables (finances, employment status, encouragement from faculty, ability to transfer) weigh heavily in the model for non-traditional students.

In an attempt to integrate the two models, Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) combined the factors to develop a persistence model. The resulting model of persistence behavior contains eight factors (in decreasing importance): intent to persist, gpa, institutional commitment, encouragement from friends and family, goal commitment, academic integration, finance attitudes, and social integration.

Graduate Models of Student Persistence

The undergraduate models provide a basis for developing a model for graduate degree attrition, however, as Girves and Wemmerus (1988) point out, the variables influencing graduate degree persistence differ from those relevant to undergraduate degree completion. In an attempt to develop such a model, Girves and Wemmerus identified two graduate degree models, one for master's degree persistence and a distinct one for doctoral degree persistence. The doctoral persistence model includes three factors. The first factor, involvement in one's program, relates to financial support (e.g. assistantships) and the student perception of their relationship with the faculty. The second factor is the student/faculty relationship itself (rather than just the student's perception of the relationship). The final factor includes departmental characteristics (size, type). The model excludes gpa because, the authors suggest, there is very little variance among the gpa's of doctoral students.

Tinto's (1993) theory of doctoral completion mirrors his undergraduate theory in that it is a longitudinal model of doctoral persistence. While undergraduate persistence rests in a large part on the institution, Tinto (1993) noted that doctoral persistence is more a reflection of the field, or department, rather than the university. Departmental effects, then, contribute more strongly to the model rather than institutional effects. In this model, Tinto (1993) preserved the academic and social integration components of the model but admitted that these two components are more closely tied to each other than in the undergraduate model. More informal faculty-student interaction typifies the doctoral relationship. Outside (external) influences, namely family and work, may influence the student to the point of initiating negative role conflicts. Family and work conflict with timely degree progress or degree persistence rather than support it.

Tinto (1993) noted three distinct stages of doctoral completion. First, the initial year of study acts as a transition stage where social and academic interactions commence. Second, in the period toward attainment of candidacy the student focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of competencies, both in research and the primary field of study. In this time period, the academic and social lines become blurred as the student interacts more informally with the faculty member, especially the adviser. The third stage consists of final candidacy (after comprehensive exams) through the completion of the dissertation. In this stage, Tinto argues, persistence may rely on the behavior of the primary faculty member with whom the student has the most contact, namely the dissertation adviser. In addition, external communities (work, family) gain in importance since they limit the student's time on campus.

In this longitudinal model of doctoral completion, five factors influence doctoral persistence. First, student attributes comprise a persistence factor. These attributes include student characteristics, educational experiences, the student background, and financial resources. These attributes give rise to the second factor, entry orientations. This factor includes educational and occupational goals, educational, occupational, and institutional commitments, and financial assistance. The external goals and commitments of the second factor and lead to the student's form of participation, resulting in the third factor, the institutional experience. Nested within the university or the school lies the department or program. The department consists of two parts. First, the academic system includes classroom and faculty interactions and formal graduate positions (fellowship, assistantship). Second, the social system depends on both peer and less formal faculty relationships. The institutional academic and social experience leads directly to the integration of the student with the program, the fourth factor. As in the undergraduate model, this factor consists of both academic and social integration. Integration leads directly into candidacy, and the final stage, the research experience. In this fifth factor, the department comprises the internal structure of the factor: research opportunities, faculty-adviser relationships, and financial support. External commitments influence this factor and both lead directly toward doctoral persistence. Tinto (1993) suggests that "the faculty-mentor relationship...is the most likely to shape completion" (p.241).

Literature Relating to ABD Status

In a study spanning ten universities, Bowen and Rudenstine (1993) found that 81% of the students who reach ABD status finish their degrees. Their sample consisted of 10 university doctoral programs and

may not be generalizable to all doctoral programs, however, it indicates one conditional probability of degree completion. A current problem they cite includes two facets, the rising proportion of students who attain ABD status but do not finish the degree and the lengthening of time spent as an ABD student before finishing the program. Students who do not finish their degrees after attaining ABD status cite a variety of reasons for leaving the program. In a study of 25 ABD students who left one doctoral program, Jacks, Chubin, Porter, and Connolly (1983) found the following reasons for leaving: financial difficulties (44%), poor working relationship with adviser and/or committee (44%), substantive problems with the dissertation research (36%), personal or emotional problems (36%), receipt of an attractive job offer (32%), interference of paid work with dissertation work (28%), family demands (24%), lack of peer support (20%), and loss of interest in earning a PHD (12%).

In addition to these reasons, Bowen and Rudenstine (1993) posited four other factors contributing to the length of time between ABD status and degree. First, the selection of an appropriate dissertation topic may take one to two years. Within the area of topic selection, the student faces problems such as growing complexity in the field, the necessity of complex, interdisciplinary approaches to research, expectations placed on and by the student regarding the complexity of the dissertation, and program "burn-out", or a desire to take a break between achievement of candidacy and the commencement of the dissertation.

Second, the student may be required to undertake extensive archival work or fieldwork during the data gathering phase of the dissertation process. This work often occurs outside the student's university and thus increases the time to complete a doctorate and the likelihood of not completing the degree. Often the type of fieldwork necessary is expensive and leads to discouragement or the inclination to change research topics.

Third, in a point common to the Jacks, Chubin, Porter, and Connolly (1983) study, dissertation advising may be a stumbling block to completion. Although the adviser often facilitates the progress of the dissertation, problems may arise including differing expectations between adviser and student, availability of the dissertation adviser, and lack of regular contact between the student and the adviser. Sorenson and Kagan (1987) cited examples of conflicts between doctoral candidates and their sponsors. They conclude that the personality of the student and the adviser must match on the levels of (a) dependence versus independence, (b) nurturance versus distance, and (c) epistemological preference.

Finally, the problem of isolation of the student leads to increased time or failure to complete the degree. Since the dissertation writing phase is not collaborative, and during this time students are often off-campus, the students experience a feeling of isolation. This isolation differs from most educational experiences, and often the student finds the transition from collaborative scholar to isolated writer a difficult one.

Wilson (1965), in a study relating time to the attainment of the PhD, stated that individuals who complete their degrees in better than average time differ in several ways from students who take longer to finish. In general, the faster group planned to attain the degree earlier in their educational careers and pursued the PhD with less time from undergraduate to graduate degree. The faster students attended part-time less than the slower group. The faster group had a broader base of financial support and fewer dependents at all stages of the doctoral program. Women generally take longer to complete the degree (Hite, 1985; Wilson, 1965). A problem facing graduate students, especially female students, is role conflict in integrating home, school, and work responsibilities (Hite, 1985; Kaplan, 1982). In listing specific factors which lengthen time to degree, Wilson (1965) noted 14 separate factors: discontinuity of attendance, work as a teaching assistant, the nature of the dissertation subject, residing off-campus, financial reasons, inadequate language preparation, lack of coordination on the part of the student, family issues, inadequate preparation, change of topic, change of field, acting as a research assistant, change in committee, and health of the student.

Although institutional and departmental requirements often influence the amount of time to the completion of the degree, the student characteristics remain the most important barriers to degree completion (Isaac, Quinlan, & Walker, 1992; Stricker, 1994). Faculty perceptions of why students do not

finish the doctoral dissertation vary by field, but the overriding reasons include financial support, lack of preparation, difficulty defining the research topic, and employment (Isaac, Quinlan, & Walker, 1992).

Persistence and Delay: The ABD Student

This section illustrates the final stage of the doctoral degree, dissertation completion, using three different "types" of students and various models of graduate persistence. The student types are derived from the author's experience as a doctoral student and statistical consultant for over 25 ABD students, and do not typify one student or another but rather a composite of all student contacts. All of the students with whom the author had contact were or are students in the Graduate School of Education, however, the student types may be applied to other fields as well.

Tinto's (1993) model of doctoral persistence includes both department and external commitments as factors leading to doctoral degree persistence. Nested within the department lie research opportunities, the faculty-adviser relationships, and financial support. This theory and prior literature regarding ABD status implies that greater research opportunities, more contact with faculty and adviser, and greater financial support increase the likelihood of finishing the degree in a timely fashion. Also, fewer external complications and greater peer and family support lead to doctoral persistence.

In practice, however, students implement the dissertation phase of their degree within their own life context. The doctoral students in the Graduate School of Education tend to be older, part-time students with outside employment, and most have families. External communities, especially family and work, play a great role in the lives of these students. In general, the student/adviser relationship outweighs all other internal departmental concerns for these students.

Doctoral Student Vignettes: ABD Student Types

Three types of students who attain ABD status are depicted in this section: the direct current, the alternating current, and the weak battery. The direct current maintains a constant level of effort throughout the dissertation process. The alternating current begins the dissertation process at a high level of effort and then varies between periods of high and low activity, not requiring much outside motivation. The weak battery has periods when effort is strong but gradually tapers off, and requires outside intervention to "jump start" the dissertation process.

The direct current

The direct current follows a direct, almost uninterrupted, path to the completion of the dissertation. This student focuses on completion, the target, from early on in the graduate career. The dissertation topic, at least in general form, is developed early in the student's coursework, and the themes of doctoral course papers reflect the dissertation topic. The stages of completion, choosing a committee, developing a proposal, completing the research, writing the dissertation, and the dissertation defense, represent methodical stops along the path. This type of student generally maintains a strict schedule and sets definitive time-oriented goals for completion. The turn-around time between faculty comments on dissertation chapters and revisions is very short, usually within two weeks. Although distractions may arise, this type of student quickly overcomes the delays to maintain the schedule. Other external concerns take a backseat to dissertation completion. For the person working full-time, this may mean taking a sabbatical, leave of absence, or vacation time to complete the dissertation.

The impetus for being an direct current student may be internal or external. Sometimes, this type of directness typifies other aspects of the student's life as well. Other times, an external need, such as employment, drives the student toward the goal.

Tinto's (1993) theory of graduate persistence includes the departmental and external communities. The direct current student generally has a great amount of contact with the department, primarily the faculty adviser, throughout the dissertation phase. This student seeks the input from the faculty adviser and follows the necessary steps to completion, with a "just-do-it" philosophy. The research-related opportunities in the model reflect the student's dissertation research, for which the student takes full

responsibility. Usually the type of research is able to be completed by the student alone. Financial concerns are minimized for this student because of the quick progression of the dissertation phase. External communities, primarily work and family, play a role in this student's progress. Supportive environments in both areas enhance the ability of the student to complete the degree, however, this type of student often puts aside work or family-related problems until the degree is completed.

Girves and Wemmerus (1988) developed a model with three factors: (a) involvement in one's program, including financial support and the student perception of their relationship with the faculty, (b) the quality of the student/faculty relationship, and (c) departmental characteristics. For the direct current, the faculty/student relationship is usually strong and includes good communication. Departmental characteristics do not play a large role in the success or failure of the direct current student to attain a degree. The student's own personality determines the completion of the degree.

Other problems which lead to increased doctoral degree completion time: financial concerns, lack of coordination, change of topic, lack of preparation, do not seem to affect this type of student. The financial issue is mitigated by the rapid completion time.

There are benefits and problems for the direct current student. The primary benefit is rapid degree completion. Few research pitfalls seem to distract the direct current. This type of student seeks immediate help when any problem arises and relies on authoritative sources to assist in solving problems. A research-related problem that may affect the direct current is the nature of fast-paced inquiry. Sometimes, areas may be overlooked which added time would reveal. If financial circumstances allow, this type of student generally takes a leave of absence from work in order to work more-or-less full-time on the dissertation.

Rapid completion is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for a doctoral student to be an direct current. Generally, this type of student is well prepared and has settled on a topic before ABD status attainment. The constancy of focus toward the goal and the steady, continual progression toward the degree typify the direct current student. This type of student generally finishes the degree in a relatively rapid fashion.

The alternating current

The alternating currents starts the dissertation phase fairly strong and experiences spurts of progress and delay throughout the process. This student typically settles on a dissertation topic with relative ease, and progresses through the proposal and research at a steady pace. However, at any time during the dissertation process, short or long time delays interrupt the student's progress toward the degree. This student generally sets no specific completion date but has a general idea of a completion timeline. When distractions arise, they usually have some delay effect and may cause a great delay for this student. This student generally has many roles, including work and family, and divides time alternately among all sources trying to keep each one powered "just enough" to maintain balance among all areas.

The alternating current acts as such because of the multi-faceted nature of the conflicting roles. The importance of completion of the degree maintains a relative standing to the other roles in the alternating current's life. When the degree achieves primary importance, the progression toward completion continues. When work or family replace the degree in importance, delays in degree completion occur.

The alternating current takes a place in Tinto's (1993) theory of graduate persistence. Within the internal departmental communities, the alternating current may or may not take advantage of research opportunities, depending on the nature of the research and whether it will create more role conflict. Generally only research related to the dissertation interests the alternating current. Other involvements with research add to the number of sources the alternating current must power and are less likely to be accepted. The alternating current meets with faculty and the dissertation adviser when time permits, however the time lapses between meetings depend upon the number of other involvements of the student. Financial considerations may cause limited delays in the progress of the student although they are generally not a factor since this type of student finds necessary funds when needed. External communities contribute the most to the delays facing the alternating current. This student attends to the most pressing issue at any given time. The external influences, primarily work and family, take time away from the doctoral research.

Although all roles may be fulfilled simultaneously, the external communities play the largest role in delaying the student's completion.

All three factors from the Girves and Wemmerus (1988) model influence the alternating current student. The student's involvement in the program varies during this stage. The student generally does not rely on financial support from the university in this stage because ABD status lasts longer than the institution's financial benevolence. The student may rely on student loans or personal finances in this time. The student's perception of the quality of the relationship with the adviser varies also. usually contact with the adviser is initiated by the student when some progress has been made on the dissertation. The perception of the roles of the student and the adviser may be a cause of slowing down dissertation progress. Sometimes the student and the faculty adviser have differing ideas about their roles. Departmental characteristics may play a role in the dissertation progress, however the student's own time demands usually impede progress on the dissertation.

Benefits and problems exist for the alternating current student. The primary benefit is the maintenance of all facets of the student's life. Although role conflict causes stress, by "powering" the most pressing issue in the student's life, the alternating current maintains relative balance. The time to completion of the degree increases for this student over the direct current, but whether or not the student will finish is usually not an issue, unless the student takes more time than the university allows for degree completion. A problem for this student is a lack of continuity when working on the dissertation. When long periods of inactivity exist between work sessions, the student must become reacquainted with the data and the dissertation. A second problem is timeliness of the research. Since the dissertation takes longer to complete, the likelihood of others publishing similar research first increases. A third problem exists when the alternating current becomes overwhelmed with balancing the dissertation, family, and work. Usually this occurs when a critical problem, such as the death of a family member, a marital or family crises, or employment changes, enters the student's life. These problems take precedence over the dissertation, and lead to longer periods of inactivity.

The battery

The third type of student is the battery. At times the battery is strong and progresses toward completion in a steadfast manner. At other times, the battery is weak and requires a "jump start" from an external source to progress. The battery may stop and leave the doctoral program altogether. Predicting persistence for the battery is difficult if not impossible, as is predicting completion time. At any phase in the dissertation process, the battery may be focused or standing still. For example, in choosing the dissertation topic, the battery may require several jumpstarts. This type of student often changes topics several times before settling on a manageable, relevant topic. Alternately, the battery may select a topic with relatively little difficulty. Long delays at any point in the dissertation process with no self-starting typifies the battery. This type of student usually requires great assistance in at least one phase of the research: conducting the research, analyzing the data, or writing the dissertation. The battery relies heavily on faculty, family, and peer support to complete the dissertation.

Persistence depends on many factors for the battery. The departmental and outside support systems need to be constant and strong for this type of student to persist. At any point in the dissertation phase, the battery may continue or fail due to internal or external factors. This type of student requires the most nurturing of all three types.

With respect to Tinto's (1993) model of doctoral degree persistence, the battery relies on both internal and external communities throughout any phase of the dissertation process. This student requires extensive support from the faculty adviser or other faculty members during the research phase and writing of the dissertation. Often, the battery is ill-prepared to conduct research and relies on the faculty adviser to fill in the gaps. Financial problems can drain the battery and cause delays or non-completion of the degree. External communities often cause the battery to focus elsewhere. Family or work-related problems often overwhelm the battery, causing long delays or dropping out of the program. This type of student may not have forged student relationships and find the isolation of the dissertation phase of the doctoral program overwhelming. On the other hand, the battery may receive jumpstarts from external communities.

Sometimes, jumpstarts from work (such as promotion or salary opportunities) and family or friend encouragement causes the battery to restart and finish the dissertation.

All three factors from the Girves and Wemmerus (1988) doctoral persistence model are important to this type of student. This type of student does not rely on financial support from the university since the student is ABD for a long period of time. The relationship between the student and the advisor seems to be less supportive than in the other types of students. The weak battery sometimes needs to change advisers or committee members but is often reluctant or unable to do so. This type of student is most vulnerable to a poor relationship with the faculty adviser and will leave the program if the relationship is weak. Departmental characteristics affect this type of student more than the other two. If, for example, a department is large, the weak battery may be the student who was allowed into the program when their likelihood of persistence was small.

Generally the problems outweigh the benefits for the battery. Often, this type of student feels isolated from other students and the university and becomes easily discouraged. Without "jump starts" the battery student will not finish the degree. The primary benefit may occur when the student receives support from outside sources. The support may lead the student to become a better researcher and to finish the degree.

Suggestions for Persistence by Student Type

All doctoral students may not fit into one of the three categories: the direct current, the alternating current, and the battery. In fact, most students may reflect the alternating current rather than the other two. Of the 25 students from whom these types were derived, about 10% were direct currents, 60% were alternating currents and 30% were batteries. However, the reasons for persistence for each type of student rest in different areas.

Knowing the "type" of student may help both the student and the university assist in degree completion. The direct current student's motivation for completion is largely internal. This type of student will complete the degree regardless of external influences. If this student fails to persist, the reason usually lies in the student's own goal changes. However, this type of student may benefit from student support groups such as a "dissertation club", monthly or bi-monthly meetings of ABD students.

The alternating current's probability of completion is also high, however the length of time from attainment of ABD status to degree completion is longer than for the direct current student. Finding time to concentrate on the degree remains the major problem facing this student. The alternating current also often faces the problem of lack of motivation or a feeling that the task is overwhelming. For this student, looking at the whole dissertation as a series of smaller projects helps break down the overwhelming nature of the process. In addition, contacts on campus with students and university faculty provide academic motivation for the student. Support groups, formal or informal, help this type of student re-focus on the importance of the dissertation.

The weak battery student is the most likely to fail to persist. This student's progress is often halted because the student does not know the next "step" toward completion. For this student, additional on-campus contacts, with faculty and students, are essential. Support groups may backfire, however, if the majority of the other students progress at a much quicker rate than the weak battery. This type of student tends to stop meeting with other students whose progress far exceeds their own. University-sponsored meetings of students at the same stage (formulation of a topic, proposal writing, literature review, research, data analysis, chapter writing) may benefit this type of student more than meetings of ABD students in all stages of completion. Faculty contacts are essential for this type of student. Since the weak battery does not often seek out faculty assistance, the contacts should be faculty-initiated. The university faculty must decide whether or not to implement faculty-initiated meetings since the burden then shifts to the faculty member. In this type of student's case, which is more important--degree persistence or the development of the student to take the full responsibility for research? For the other two types of students, the two are not mutually exclusive, but the weak battery may need more faculty guidance at the dissertation phase of the doctoral program. If the weak battery can be identified before the attainment of ABD status, then

additional coursework or research projects may be suggested to this student to develop the student's ability and independence.

Conclusion

Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of doctoral persistence provides a framework for assessing doctoral student progress. Delays in completion of the degree once ABD status has been attained depend largely on the type of student. The direct current allows few delays in progress toward the degree and manipulates internal and external forces to assist rather than delay the progress toward the degree. The alternating current student experiences delays due to role conflicts among dissertation, work, and family. External influences affect this type of student to a great degree. The battery student's potential to succeed depends largely on internal and external influences. The battery requires one or more jumpstarts during the dissertation process, and may continue or decide not to persist at any point during the dissertation. Models of graduate persistence must include different personality characteristics in order to effectively assess student persistence.

Each type of student exhibits different needs in the ABD phase of the doctoral program. All students may benefit from student support groups and on-campus meetings, whether or not they are directly related to degree completion. Support groups can exist in-person, on the phone, or across electronic communication. The appropriate support source depends on the type of student. Faculty contacts are important for the alternating current student and especially for the battery student.

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The Dissertation:

Academic Interruptus

Elinor Katz Ph.D.

University of Denver

Paper presented as part of a symposium entitled "Graduates and ABD"S in Colleges of Education: Characteristics and Implications for the Structure of Doctoral Programs" at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1995

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to summarize the factors leading to completion, delay, or noncompletion of the dissertation. This paper will provide a discussion of the doctoral degree, the dissertation, a four party process, the College of Education Research Project, ABD's barriers and roadblocks, and recommendations for improving the dissertation process. Highlights of the previous four papers from this symposium will be included in the discussion. Recommendations for restructuring the dissertation process include the development of dissertation seminars and clubs, more faculty support at critical stages in the process, and the infusion of more research experiences in the graduate program.

The Doctoral Degree

The Ph.D is the highest academic degree. According to the Council of Graduate Schools (1990) the doctoral program is designed to prepare a student to be a scholar who can discover, integrate, and apply knowledge as well as disseminate and communicate it. A graduate program should emphasize the development of the students's ability to make a contribution the chosen field of study. A well prepared graduate student will be able to understand and critically evaluate the literature and be able to apply it to issues and problems. It is also expected that the student will have a close association with faculty members who are experienced in research and teaching.

Many doctoral students have positive and successful experiences, but a large percentage of doctoral students do not complete the degree. Bowen and Rudenstein (1992) examined thirty years of statistical records and reported that fewer than half of all students entering into a Ph.D program completed the degree. They reported that time-to-degree (TTD) also affects completion rates. Graduate students in Education had a median TTD of over twelve years. This represents one of the longest time periods, especially in comparison to a typical Ph.D recipient in the physical sciences who completed the degree in six years.

There are many factors which influence the completion or non-completion of the doctoral degree. Completion rates and median TTD factors are two important concerns, but there are many other factors which should be investigated. The purpose of this symposium was to examine the multiple factors leading to the completion or non completion of the doctoral degree. Of central interest were the factors that could be incorporated into the selection and advisement process. The first two symposium papers report the results of an in-house survey. Selected cognitive and affective factors were assessed, as well as demographic and situational factors. The subjects were 145 College of Education Students who graduated during the last five years and 111 College of Education "All But Dissertation (ABD)" doctoral students. The research study had three phases. First, data were collected from student files for the completers and the non-completers. Second, two focus groups with follow-up sessions were held with students to discuss the barriers to dissertation completion and strategies for encouraging completion. Lastly, a survey was developed based on the review of current literature and the focus group input.

Two additional research studies were conducted to examine the students' perspective, one using a multiple case study investigating the factors affecting completion and non-completion in nontraditional aged women, and a second from an ABD's perspective.

Retention of graduate students is a major concern in higher education today. Enrollment and completion rates have a direct impact on both the university's reputation and financial standing. The university and students are key participants in the educational process and a major allocation of time, energy, and resources are expected on both sides. This is especially true for the doctoral program.

Nerad and Cerny (1991) described five stages of the doctoral program: (1) course work; (2) preparation for the oral or written qualifying examination; (3) finding a dissertation topic, selecting a dissertation advisor, and writing a proposal; (4) the actual dissertation research and writing; and (5) applying for professional employment. Many students move through each stage successfully and with an appropriate time line. Yet, for other highly qualified students there is a serious interruption in their progress. For many this takes place at the third stage, entering into the dissertation process. The intention of this research project was to gain a better understanding from the graduate students' perspective of the positive and negative factors associated with the completion or non-completion of the doctoral degree.

The Dissertation

The dissertation has its historical origins in medieval times, when in order to teach students needed to obtain a degree from a university. According to Cone and Foster (1993), graduate students were prepared for the teaching role by a "sponsoring doctor" who stayed with the student until the process was completed. This was the beginning of the dissertation committee chairperson. Today, the graduate student works with both a dissertation chair and committee who provide support and advice throughout the process. Graduate schools require that the dissertation research be approved in advance and be conducted under the supervision of the committee.

The dissertation fulfills two major purposes: 1) it is an intensive, highly professional training experience, the successful completion of which demonstrates the candidate's ability to address a major intellectual problem and arrive at a successful conclusion independently and at a high level of professional competence, and 2) its results constitute an original contribution to knowledge in the field (Councils of Graduate Schools). The dissertation process should be a rewarding experience for the graduate student and faculty.

Graduate study can be described as a continuum of more structured experiences during the first few years of course work, and over time becoming a less structured experience during the dissertation research. Specifically, most graduate programs have two or three years of formal courses, a less defined period of requirements such as teaching or research assignments and comprehensive examinations, and culminating in a less structured time period of intensive dissertation research (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). While these aspects of the graduate program should be viewed as a continuous process, there are particular points along the way which become problems for the graduate student.

Selecting the right dissertation topic is one of the major problems mentioned by graduate students. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) stated that many students spend one to two years looking for a research topic. In our study, College of Education graduate students said that selecting a topic was a major issue. They reported that they did not have enough experiences with major research projects prior to the dissertation study. Additional concerns for graduate students were expectations concerning the originality of the work, scholarly depth, and significance of the dissertation.

A Four Party Process

The dissertation is one of the most important aspects of the doctoral program. Even though graduate students feel a sense of isolation as they write their dissertation, there are several key players in the process. The dissertation experience involves the candidate, the dissertation advisor(s), the University, and society. Each player has an important role in the successful completion of this major effort.

Four distinct parties have a vital interest in the outcome of the dissertation process. Madsen (1992) states that every time a graduate student's research sheds light on a problem, society benefits. In the United States, society foots most of the costs associated with higher education. Yet, the value of the research contributions are worth the costs. Every time the university grants a doctoral degree, its reputation is on the line. Society should have a strong interest in maintaining the highest quality in graduate programs.

The university has a key role in maintaining an environment which establishes high standards for graduate study. Specifically, Clifford and Gutherie (1988) detail several conditions that are essential for the colleges of education to secure a productive role and important position in higher education. The five conditions are: (1) a clear sense of organizational purpose, (2) strong leadership and competent followership, (3) effective external relationships with professional educational organizations, (4) high levels of productivity, and (5) and effective alignment between organizational purposes and organizational structure.

Society, the university, and colleges of education have an important role in the completion and non-completion of the dissertation. In a way they comprise the macro environment of the dissertation process. If so, then the dissertation advisor(s) and the candidate are the micro environment.

According to the Council of Graduate Programs (1991) the major contribution of the dissertation advisor is to reduce the time spent in the process and to facilitate completion of the dissertation. Advisors should assist students in selecting manageable topics and in setting a realistic time line. Dissertation advisors should be actively engaged in advanced research and scholarship in their graduate programs.

Last but not least, a key player is the candidate. Madsen (1992) believes the student has the most to gain from a well written and carefully designed dissertation. There is a lasting satisfaction knowing that the candidate made a contribution to the field. Completion of the doctoral degree provides a sense of accomplishment and is a sign of achievement in our society.

The College of Education Research Project

This research project concentrated on the attitudes and perceptions of graduates and graduate students in order to gain a better understanding of the complex set of cognitive and affective factors influencing this process. The subjects in this study were graduate students enrolled in a midsized western university offering a doctoral degree in education (Kluever, 1995). The sample included 154 graduates who received their degree during the last five years. The second group was comprised of 111 graduate students currently enrolled in the graduate program having completed the comprehensive examinations who are "All But Dissertation"s (ABD's). The demographics of the groups indicated:

- Females made up 69% of the graduate group and 75% of the student group
- Males comprised 31% of the graduate group and 31% of the student group
- Student group (44 years) was older than the graduate group (42 years)
- GRE scores were higher for the student group
- GPA was similar for both groups
- Average time-to degree was 6.2 years

Overall, the two groups were more alike than different in terms of the demographics.

Focus groups were used at the beginning of the study to assist with the development of the survey. After the results were compiled, focus groups were organized to allow graduates and students to respond and react to the findings of the survey.

The participants were mailed a survey that was 12 pages in length with a total of 157 closed questions and 1 open ended question. The survey included demographic questions, items related to attitudes about the dissertation process, help and hindrance scales, perceptions of responsibility, and a modified version of the procrastination inventory.

Help-Hindrance Scale

On the help-hindrance scales the major hindrances were time pressures and financial and family concerns. Students felt that they did not have much research or publishing experiences. The highest ranked help item was persistence. There were significant differences on 29 out of the 45 items with the students' mean in the direction of hindrance. Some examples of the reported hindrances were organizational skills, lack of constructive feedback, and collegial relationship with advisor. There were differences between the attitudes of the two groups with graduates having a greater sense of independence and personal responsibility (Kluever, 1995).

Responsibility Scale

On the responsibility items the students rated tasks seen as university responsibility higher than the graduates. These items involved progressing through the dissertation, selecting a dissertation topic, locating research subjects, and scheduling the time line for the dissertation. Students suggested that regularly scheduled visits with one's advisor, dissertation seminars, and a thorough understanding of the university guidelines (Kluever,1995).

Procrastination Scale

A modified version of a procrastination scale was incorporated into the survey. Expected differences between the students and graduates were found. Some of the differences were higher student means in low frustration tolerance, rebellion, difficulty making decisions, need for approval, unable to take help, self-denigration, insufficient reinforcement, and task aversion. Of note, Perfectionism scores and procrastination as a work style scores were on average no different for the two groups. Green (1995) suggests that the ABD's in this study reported personal skill deficits more strongly than task complaints.

Focus Groups

Focus groups may look like other groups, according to Krueger (1994), however focus groups have a distinctive set of characteristics:

1. Focus groups involve homogeneous people in a social interaction in a series of discussions.
2. The purpose of focus groups is to collect qualitative data from a focused discussion.

3. Focus groups are a qualitative approach to gathering data.

The first focus group conducted for this study consisted of five graduates discussing their dissertation experiences with a doctoral student serving as a moderator. The graduates described their experiences during the dissertation process as a challenge, as a process of learning to narrow the topic until it was manageable, and reported feelings of being overwhelmed with the amount of work associated with the dissertation. The factors which led to their successful completion of the dissertation were supportive and encouraging advisors, keeping focused and passionate, using time management skills, and MONEY. Specific problems were time and energy, lack of guidelines, not enough prior research experiences, and self discipline. They reported behaviors which hindered the process as time problems in turning around draft copies, co-advisors, and had to constantly monitor being overwhelmed.

In contrast, the focus group of eight graduate students (ABD's) felt the university should be responsible for reconnecting and supporting doctoral students until graduation. In describing their experiences during the dissertation process, they felt they had very little support after course work was completed, dissertation courses didn't help with the actual project, and the faculty didn't care if you finished. The factors related to the lack of dissertation completion are heavy workloads, wanting to do it all and do it well, and that the public schools do not support the goal of completing the dissertation. If given the choice to do it over again most said they would, but would do it quickly, stay in the graduate student role rather than take a full time job, and buy a computer. The seven off campus students in aseparate focus group said that the distance from campus was an issue, as were lack of contact with faculty members, and difficulty selecting a dissertation topic.

The focus group of six graduate students responding to the results of the survey agreed that family and work responsibilities were a major consideration. The group suggested that 60% of the problem was the selection of the topic and 40% was the selection of the advisor. The isolation from family and friends was another issue. Their best advice was to take the dissertation one step at a time and set short term goals.

Women and the Doctoral Dissertation

The Summary Report 1992 of Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities indicated women continued to earn increasing numbers of doctoral degrees with 14,366 women completing the Ph.D. The issues investigated in the paper entitled "Factors Affecting the Completion of the Doctoral Dissertation for Non-Traditional Aged Women" added a rich dimension to this research project. Lenz (1995) conducted in depth interviews with three women who completed the Ph.d and three ABD students. The participants openly discussed issues related to working on the dissertation. The recurrent themes such as importance of the dissertation topic and advisor, family and peer support, time, and money supported the finding reported in the literature and survey research. All of the women appeared to have perfectionistic tendencies, but the completers were able to move beyond the blocks and complete the research project. Another important finding was related to the self-in-relation theory with completers showing more positive support from family, friends, and advisors. The completers accepted responsibility for their own dissertations. They did not expect the university or advisors to provide the motivation to complete the dissertation. One of the key factors for success with the dissertation may be associated with internal motivation.

A Student's Perspective

This research project focused on the attitudes and perspective of students in the dissertation process. Persistence is one of the key factors leading to the successful completion of the doctoral degree. Miller (1995) linked the theories related to student persistence with descriptions of three types of graduate students pursuing the Ph.D. The doctoral model for persistence developed by Girves and Wemmerus (1988) includes the degree of involvement in one's graduate program and the relationship with the faculty advisor, the quality of the relationship between the advisor and student, and the departmental characteristics as components.

The doctoral student vignettes present three ABD Student types: the direct current, the alternating current, and the weak battery. According to Miller (1995) the direct current maintains a constant level of effort throughout the dissertation process. The alternating current begins the process at a high level of effort an then varies with high and low activity, not requiring much outside motivation. The weak battery

has periods when effort is strong but gradually tapers off, and requires an outside intervention to "jump start" the dissertation. This theory into practice paper strongly supports the importance of the key players in the dissertation process.

ABD's Barriers and Roadblocks

One of the primary purposes of this study was to gain a better understanding of the barriers and roadblocks graduate students experience as they pursue the doctoral degree. Some of the barriers summarized by Madsen (1992) refer to ABD's as members of "The Schubert Society" so named after the composer of Symphony No. 8 in B minor, also known as the "Unfinished Symphony." As noted throughout this paper, there are many factors influencing the completion or non-completion of the dissertation. Some of them are related to money running short, illness, martial discord and other personal problems that interfere with the research project. With regard to the dissertation the topic becomes unmanageable, enthusiasm wanes, and time flies away. Madsen (1992) considered some of the circumstances which lead to delays with the dissertation.

Too Soon Adieu

The best advice is to stay on campus until the dissertation is finished or do not leave the university without the degree in hand. Too many times the economic pressures and the enticement of a wonderful job opportunity pull the doctoral student away from campus. The result is too little time or energy to work on the dissertation research once away from academic life. If a student needs to leave campus, the second best advice is to have as much of the dissertation completed as possible before departing.

Too Much Enthusiasm, Too Little Focus

Graduate students have a tendency to be interested and enthusiastic about many topics. They bring a great deal of energy to the research project. The issue is narrowing the scope of their interests so that it does not become a problem in selecting a topic, establishing a reasonable time line, and a plan to complete the dissertation in a reasonable length of time.

Too Hard To Please

Some students never complete the dissertation because there is one more citation...another section for the lit review...more examples of research studies... and so on until time move on. The perfectionist requires support, understanding, and agreed upon deadlines. An advisor can play an important part in assisting the student to set realistic goals and schedules.

Too Long in Transit

The fear of failure or fear of success are linked to the time involved in working on the dissertation. The process of working on a research or writing project tends to bring out the procrastinator in all of us. If a student cannot come to grips with this issue, they can remain in transit for long periods of time.

Too Much Isolation

For many students, working on the dissertation is a lonely and isolated experience. The long hours spent in the library looking for sources, reading research materials, and writing the dissertation separate the doctoral student from activities with family and friends. Few experiences in life isolate people from each other for such an extended period of time.

Colleges of education have vested interests in the successful completion of the dissertation. "Every time a graduate student's dissertation sheds some light on a dark corner of human understanding and banishes some segment,however small of the world's mystery, society reaps incalculable benefits"(Madsen, 1992 p.14). The challenge for colleges of education is to review current policies and practice with the intention of improving the dissertation process.

Recommendations for Improving the Dissertation Process

The four key players in the dissertation process can benefit by giving thoughtful consideration to recommendations that would lead to successful completion of the doctoral degree. Some specific recommendation for each player are:

Society

Society needs highly trained specialists in many fields of study of study. The need cannot be satisfied by the current number of doctoral students in the field. To meet increasing demands we need to attract more graduate students and get them through graduate school more efficiently (Ziolkowski, 1990).

University

The university should provide a well organized academic program with clearly defined expectations for the graduate students. Members of the faculty should consider themselves as a community of scholars and reflect this behavior in research and teaching activities. Financial aid is needed to assist students during their dissertation research. One suggestion would be for a college of education to have a number of dedicated assistantships or a completion fellowship for students actively engaged in their research project. Colleges of education should do a program review of the research course offerings to see if the courses are providing the research skills needed to conduct dissertation research. Members of the faculty and graduates of the doctoral program should participate in this review process. Students should be oriented to the research expectations of a doctoral program upon entering the program. This expectation should be reinforced throughout the course work by requiring independent research projects, supporting students who present conference papers, and holding department or college wide research days at which faculty and students present their work.

Specifically, Colleges of education should have an annually updated list of graduate students, their dissertation advisors, and their research topics. A similar list should be available of the department members with information about their areas of research, list of publications, and indication of availability to advise a dissertation. A Dissertation Handbook with details about the standards expectations for both graduate students and advisors would be most useful. It is also important for colleges of education to keep records regarding the length of time to completion of the doctoral dissertation (Councils of Graduate Schools,1991).

Dissertation Advisors

Dissertation advisors are the role models and support system for doctoral students. Graduate students should be involved in research projects throughout the graduate program to prepare them for the dissertation study. An advisor can help graduate students select a manageable topic, assist with the scope of the research design, help with time management, and encourage completion of the dissertation (Council of Graduate Schools,1991). An advising system that matches entering students with advisors based on interests and also personality could be instituted.

Dissertation advisors should consider organizing dissertation support groups, seminars or a Dissertation Day. Our program has sponsored informal support groups, monthly seminars, and Dissertation Day for students who have left campus. The sense of isolation when working on the dissertation is a problem from many students. A supportive environment is one of the major factors which assisted students in completing the dissertation. Another approach is to team students who are at the same point in the process; teams can provide mutual support.

One helpful example was a university offering two workshops for graduate students working on their dissertations. The topics were " Tips for Writing the Dissertation" and " The View from the Other Side of The Desk"(Nerad & Cerny, 1991). The first seminar was to assist the doctoral with information about organizing and writing the dissertation. The intention of the second seminar is to have the dissertation advisors describe their expectations for the dissertation. Other interesting topics could discuss

time management strategies, balancing personal and professional responsibilities while doing disseration research, and using technology in research projects.

It is important to remember that the dissertation is the beginning of one's scholarly work, not its culmination. Dissertation research should prepare the students for the research/scholarship that will be expected after they finish the doctoral degree (Council of Graduate Schools, 1991).

The Candidate

There are many recommendations for doctoral students. The following list was compiled with the intention of providing useful ideas for the doctoral candidate.

<u>In the beginning.....</u>

1. Doctoral students should be aware of the guidelines and expectations related to the dissertation.
2. It is recommended that careful consideration be given to the selection of the dissertation advisor and members of the committee. Students should discuss potential committee members with the chairperson prior to asking them to serve and reconsider nominees if one is vetoed by the chair.
3. Doctoral students should identify their research interests and possible topics as early as possible in their graduate programs.
4. Doctoral students should "get on line" and utilize technology as a tool to assist with the dissertation.

<u>During the dissertation.....</u>

5. The candidate should develop a time management plan with realistic goals. A reward should be considered as each goal is achieved or a punishment if the goal is not attained.
6. The candidate should network with other students working on their doctoral dissertations. Seminars and support groups are excellent ways to make these connections.
7. The candidate should find a mentor; this is especially important for support, stress management, and encouragement.

<u>Towards completion.....</u>

8. Keep the momentum going by sharing preliminary research results with your advisor and fellow graduate students or by participating in a research seminar.
9. Attend a professional conference, such as the American Educational Research Association, to participate in the graduate student seminars, doctoral dissertation awards, and meet scholars in the field.
10. Accept the reality that "Murphy's Law" will be there when you least expect it.

Several graduate students participating in the survey shared their best advice for graduate students struggling with the dissertation. In their own words they suggest that the dissertation process is more about you and your personal growth, professional skills, and attitude than it is about external factors such as advisors, topics, data, and university requirements. See these things as opportunities for you to become a more self actualized person and a more complete professional. The second recommendation is to love the topic--you will live with it- be passionate and feel it. You will contribute to the body of knowledge in your field. Make a time line for yourself and stick with it. Help manage the committee by making monthly meetings and sticking to the schedule. Make sure that you accomplished what you promised the advisors. Learn to bite the elephant one bite at a time.

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Appendix A

The Dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF DENVER
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

THE DISSERTATION

The successful completion of a dissertation is the culmination of doctoral study. The dissertation provides students with the opportunity to display their knowledge in a specialized area of study and to demonstrate creative skills in defining a program and conducting original research to shed light on that problem. The doctorate is not granted to those who simply accumulate the proper number of credits; rather, it is awarded to those who have demonstrated significant skills in conceptualizing, conducting, and defending original research. It is possible, therefore, that a student may success in completing course work, but have difficulty or fail in efforts t complete the dissertation.

1. The dissertation deals with a significant issue or problem.

Education is a professional field. As such, its practitioners must confront and solve practical problems in curriculum and instruction, in administration, or in the provision of human services. Education is also a controversial field, one in which there is often sharp disagreement about educational philosophy, theory, and practice. A doctoral dissertation in Education must deal with a relevant issue - a proposition or set of propositions about which there may be honest disagreement - and must address a problem, i.e., a matter of professional concern or activity wherein some significant improvement in practice could be brought about through improved understanding of the phenomena involved. Unlike certain areas of research, educational research is directed toward some immediate or long-range solution of an actual problem confronted by educators. The contribution of the research may be a clearer understanding of a philosophical issue, a testing of theory, or the development and evaluation of a new practice. The research, therefore, can be either "basic" or "applied", but it must be relevant to some problem faced by educators.

2. The dissertation employs a theoretical awareness and a discernible methodology.

It has been said that nothing is as practical as a good theory. A dissertation must be located within some broad range of theory and must employ an explicit and discernible methodology. Theory provides the setting; methodology is the road that is traveled in solving the problem. The research must utilize the theories and methodologies generally associated with one or more of the academic disciplines. It must employ a recognized and accepted set of methods and techniques or create and test new methods and techniques. Efforts by university faculties to come to agreement about which methods are acceptable and which techniques are to be excluded generally result in a stalemate. It is our policy not to exclude *a priori* any particular methodology, nor to give greater prestige or preference to a particular methodology. Thus students are free to employ, for example, experimental design, case studies, correctional studies, or historical studies, depending on the appropriateness of the methodology to the problem under investigation. It is recognized that the level of information available varies with the type of problem and the extent to which it has been investigated. Methodology *per see* is not the issue; but the appropriateness of the methodology and the manner of its employment within a theoretical framework are extremely important.

It should be recognized, however, that individual faculty members, because of their particular skills and/or philosophical biases, may prefer to be involved with certain kinds of research and may eschew involvement with other kinds of research. We regard this as an important aspect of academic freedom, and it falls upon the student, therefore, to seek out those faculty members whose interests and methodological skills and interests are compatible with this or her projected area of research.

3. The dissertation explains the phenomena under study.

A good term paper usually resorts and describes a state of affairs; a dissertation goes beyond description to analysis, understanding, and explanation. Research which must ultimately shed light on a problem is designed in such a way as to analyze and explain the phenomena under investigation, i.e., to demonstrate

how something functions, why it functions the way it does, how it came to be, and/or how it is likely to function in the future. Explanations, of course, must be based on evidence. Depending on the methodology employed, the phenomena under investigation may or may not be conceptualized as variables, and the statements describing the phenomena may or may not be tested in the form of hypotheses; but all research at the doctoral level will have as its underlying goal the analysis and explanation of the phenomena under investigation as a significant ingredient in the solution of a problem.

4. The dissertation will have generalizable results.

The results of research should be of interest and value to more than one individual or set of individuals in a localized setting. A dissertation should deal with a significant issue or problem about which there is general interest or concern. The research should be designed, therefore, in such a way that the results will have implications for or be applicable to other settings. The degree to which one can generalize depends on the nature of the problem, the theory employed and the methodology. Some phenomena are "historically unique," and the degree of generalization may be limited. when proper caution has been taken against overgeneralization, the student is encourage to draw inferences from the specific to the general to validate these inferences, and, insofar as possible, to make recommendations to educators and others who face common problems in similar professional settings.

5. The dissertation will be original and creative.

The dissertation should demonstrate the student's ability to conduct original research. This does not mean that every student must embark upon something totally new and untested. The "newness" and originality must come in the way the student has conceptualized the problem and undertaken the research. Two or more researchers, sometimes far removed geographically, may knowingly be studying the same phenomena at the same time, but it is still possible for all parties to be conducting "original" research, assuming that they are using different theories, methodologies, and techniques. Originality is not a function or methodology. It is important, however, for each doctoral student to know exactly what other researchers in the field are investigating; it is not necessary to be the only person conducting investigations of the phenomena.

Mere creativity is not sufficient. A dissertation should not only be "creative," it must meet the other criteria outlined above. A student, for example, who wishes to write a fourth grad reader or design a better scheduling system for a high school may do so, but only it the "creative work" falls within some larger context, wherein the effectiveness of the project is tested in such a way as to meet the other criteria for a dissertation.

6. The dissertation will be of significant scope.

It is difficult to define the proper scope of a dissertation. Obviously, scope has little to do with the number of pages written. On the one hand, students are cautioned against undertaking a study which goes beyond the limits of their financial resources and a reasonable expenditure of time. A dissertation usually is not as extended in scope as a national study or the various types of research supported by a sponsoring agency.

To decide whether a proposed dissertation is of significant scope, students may wish to consider some of the following criteria: (a) The research should involve a number of variables. (b) The design of the study should incorporate "sufficient intellectual interest," i.e., an intelligent selection of variables and a unique combination of the variables or investigation of possible causal factors. (c) The sample should include a significant number of subjects, or, as in the case of historical research, an adequate investigation of sources. (d) The selection of subjects or material should not be unduly localized, i.e., the study should be broadly applicable or regional or national where appropriate. (e) The nature and extent of the treatment, where experimental design is involved, should be of sufficient intensity and duration to produce the anticipated effects. (f) The analysis of the data or source documents should be sufficiently complex. (g) The results should be publishable, although in a different form, in a refereed journal, or suitable for presentation at a professional meeting.